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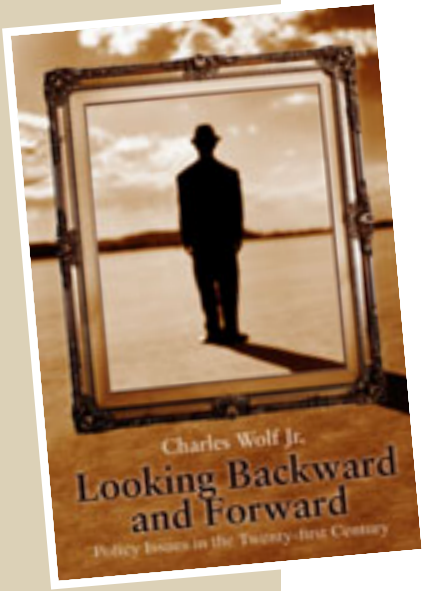

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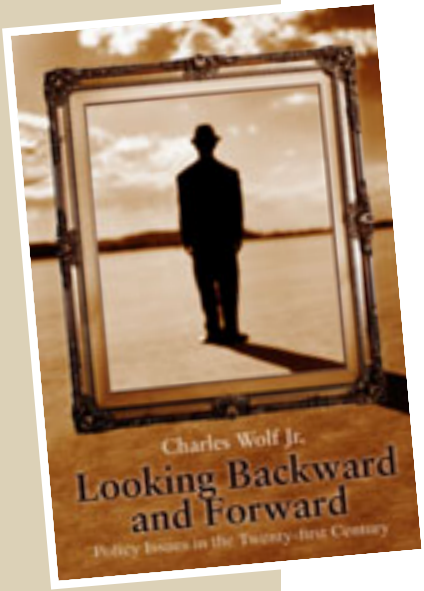

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New Jersey's Hall of Fame, Seriously

The New Jersey Hall of Fame may sound like a punchline, but it is, in fact, a living institution, enacted by the state legislature in 2005, with a fact-filled website (njhalloffame.com) and, as of last week, 15 freshman inductees.

As readers might have guessed, The Scrapbook has a soft spot for the Garden State—and not just because we've traversed the Turnpike or flown in and out of Newark. The Pine Barrens are one of America's natural wonders, George Washington surprised the hungover Hessians at Trenton, and we always enjoyed Johnny Carson's jokes about Ed McMahon's shore house at Avalon. Two of our colleagues, and one recent colleague, hail from New Jersey.

So, The Scrapbook wondered, who has the state of New Jersey chosen to honor among its roll of immortals? From the initial list, it's evident that the definition of a New Jerseyite is suitably relaxed. For example, Albert Einstein, who was born in Germany and spent most of his life there, is in the New Jersey Hall of Fame, as is Vince Lombardi, a Brooklynite who briefly coached high school football in Englewood. It's also clear that inductees have been heavily recruited from the present day: Of the 15 honorees, a grand total of three spent the bulk of their lives in the 19th century (Clara Barton, Thomas Edison, Harriet Tubman) and nearly half (Buzz Aldrin, Yogi Berra, Bill Bradley, Toni Morrison, Norman Schwarzkopf, Bruce Springsteen, Meryl Streep) are still very much with us.

Which means, of course, that the real news is not who has been inducted but who has been excluded. Yes, three of the names from Turnpike reststops have been recognized (Barton, Edison, Lombardi) but none of the state's signers of the Declaration of Independence, none of its delegates to the Constitutional Convention, and neither of its presidents: Woodrow Wilson, who was also governor, and Grover Cleveland, who lived in retirement in Princeton.

It gets worse. Bruce Springsteen is in, but Count Basie is not. Bill Bradley is in, but Aaron Burr is not. Malcolm Forbes is in, but Adm. William Halsey is not. Meryl Streep is in, but Justices Antonin Scalia and William Brennan are not. Toni Morrison is in, but Walt Whitman, Stephen Crane, William Carlos Williams, Edmund Wilson, Allen Ginsberg, and Philip Roth are not. New York Yankee Yogi Berra is in the New Jersey Hall of Fame, but Heavyweight Champion Jersey Joe Walcott, who spent his later years as sheriff of Camden County, is not.

And we're just getting started. Frankly, The Scrapbook is inclined to blame the selection process for these

What They Were Thinking

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Vladimir Putin, left, meets with incoming Russian president Dmitri Medvedev at the Kremlin, May 12.

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(Classic Steiner, reprinted from our issue of July 16, 2001)

shocking omissions. According to the website, something called the Hall of Fame Academy—"100 of New Jersey's most prominent organizations, ethnic groups and media outlets"—compiles lists of names in various categories, and the public is invited to comment and vote. After this American Idol-style balloting, the final decision is left to a Hall of Fame Board of Commissioners—you can imagine their deliberations!—which "reserves the right to induct additional top vote getters in each category."

There's only one solution, in The Scrapbook's opinion. To restore integrity to the process, and guarantee the reputation of the New Jersey Hall of Fame, we invite our readers in the Garden State to submit names to the Academy, and The Scrapbook will exercise its influence with friends among the commissioners. Our first suggestion: actress Tara Reid, a native of Wyckoff. ♦

Kill this Bill

A misbegotten proposal to subject just about every police and fire department to new federal collective bargaining requirements has come before the Senate. It's a terrible idea. Under the wildly misnamed "Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act," the Federal Labor Relations Authority would impose collective bargaining on all but the smallest local governments.

Roughly half of the states impose significant conditions on collective bargaining by public safety employees—two ban it outright and another dozen severely limit it. Repealing these state laws by federal fiat is bad policy; public safety employees simply don't belong in unions. Unlike 20th-century assembly line workers who were often little more than interchangeable sets of hands, public safety employees almost always have significant bargaining power. By virtue of special training, state licensing, and the government's monopoly on police power, police are difficult to replace in the short term. The same can be said of full-time professional firefighters, nearly all of them trained as paramedics. Where they exist, police and fire unions don't even need to strike—the last major public safety workers' strike happened when Boston Police took to the picket lines during 1919—to make themselves a potent political force. Even worse, the bill would extend collective bargaining protections to firefighters who work on a volunteer, part-time, or pay-per-call basis. Tiny fire departments that have as much to do with community spirit as public safety would find themselves thrown into the hurly-burly of contract negotiations.

But the worst component of the bill is its insistence on federal authority over police and fire services. America has gone from being the most dangerous and fire-prone Western nation to one of the safest and most fire-free largely because its police and fire systems respond so well to local needs. The proposed new federal authority over police and fire labor relations opens the door to greater federal authority over every other aspect of public safety.

President Bush has threatened a veto. The Senate should relieve him of this burden and vote down the proposed law. ♦

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Casual

Express Yourself

It's not often people have anything nice to say about their department of motor vehicles. On *The Simpsons*, sisters Patty and Selma, who both work at Springfield's DMV, tell their nephew Bart that some days they don't let the line move at all. "We call those days weekdays."

But my local Virginia DMV isn't quite like that. An information booth is staffed by someone friendly. The waiting time is acceptable. The facilities are clean. In fact, there is only one thing I find troubling: For just $10 per year, residents can have their very own personalized license plates. Now you might think this a good thing—what better way for the citizenry to get creative and express themselves?

As it turns out, self-expression is overrated.

To begin with, most of us don't feel any particular compulsion to put a witty message on our license plates, so the extra fee is enough to deter us. We wait for our tag with its randomly assigned letters and numbers and hope for something catchy. But what if it isn't?

In high school, my friend Steve drove a Jeep Grand Cherokee with the license plate GEY-90T. When he pulled into the school parking lot, I would yell out, "Hey guys, look who's coming. It's gay ninety-tee! What's up, gay ninety-tee?" Over and over again. Yes, I admit it was crude. It was also high school. (As a brief aside, that license plate ended up at my house. Steve gave it to me after his Cherokee's unlikely demise: It was stolen in Boston and used to smash into a Filene's Basement—all caught on video, which made the news. The suspects then incinerated the jeep, and all that was left was GEY-90T.)

But for a mere $10, you can remove any and all risk from the process. According to Melanie Stokes of the Virginia DMV's communications office, of the 7.7 million active plates in the commonwealth, more than 1 million are personalized (resulting in over $9 million in income to the state). In fact, a recent study by the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators reveals more drivers in Virginia have vanity plates as a percentage of total drivers (16 percent) than any other state in the union. Last year alone Virginia issued approximately 203,000 personalized plates.

And yet my reaction upon seeing these works of self-expression is not normally amusement. Mostly, it's bewilderment or irritation. Vanity plates are rarely as clever or fitting as the ones we see in popular culture: Remember the Ferrari 250 GT California in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* with the license plate NRVOUS? Or the annoying MY PRSHE on the Porsche 911 driven by the equally annoying Bill Lumbergh in *Office Space*? And then there was ASSMAN, belonging to a proctologist in *Seinfeld*.

Of course the latter would have been rejected by the Virginia DMV, which operates a 12-person "word" committee to decide the fate of questionable plates. Some are brought to its attention by offended drivers. Others are flagged by a computer system containing a database of more than 6,000 unacceptable word-number combinations. Over the years, as noted in the press, recalled plates have included the undeniably insulting (ZYKLON B, the poison gas used in concentration camps during the Holocaust) as well as the debatably offensive (POOFTER, 2 DYKES, JAP JUNK, and a few combinations involving the letters SUX). You can try your own combination online to see what works. At the moment, OU812, as in the Van Halen album, is taken, but both HRC SUX and KILL GOP are still available. (I am reminded of my high school algebra teacher who in his youth wanted the license plate LSD. Instead he was forced to settle for LDS—likely declaring to others he was a proud Mormon.)

Some Virginia residents, including a colleague of mine, use their initials as their license plates, which is fine by me. Many plate aficionados strive for as few characters as possible, such as A1. But a good number of vanity plates tempt you to pull alongside the car and ask the driver, "Is that really the best you could come up with?" I recall one saying TWO 2 GO. Where are you going? Cornyville?

I recently spotted a car with the license plate BE GAY. Not that we should jump to any conclusions. Perhaps the owner wants us to be happy. Or maybe he or she is a fan of golfer Notah Begay. But I'm betting this is instead a proud statement of orientation for all the world to see and urging all the world to be, and for only $10 a year.

We've come such a long way since GEY-90T.

Victorino Matus

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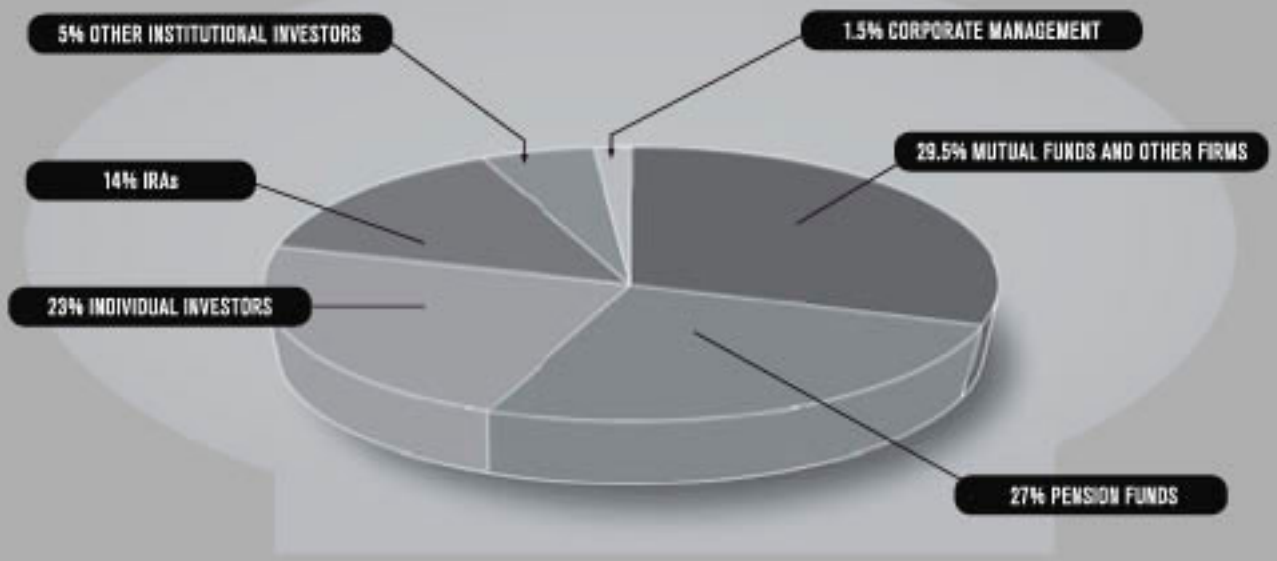
[Do you own an oil company?]



U.S. Oil and Natural Gas Company Ownership, 2007

If you own mutual funds or a retirement account, chances are you're among the tens of millions of Americans with a stake in the oil and natural gas industry. A recent study* by economist and former Clinton Administration official Robert Shapiro found the majority of oil and natural gas company shareholders are "middle-class U.S. households with mutual fund investments, pension accounts or other retirement accounts and small portfolios."

So when Congress starts talking about raising energy taxes or taking "excess profits" from U.S. oil companies, look at the facts and ask yourself, "who does that really hurt?" Read the full study at EnergyTomorrow.org.

EnergyTomorrow.org

THE *people* OF AMERICA'S OIL AND NATURAL GAS INDUSTRY

*SONECON: *The Distribution of Ownership of U.S. Oil and Natural Gas Companies*, September 2007

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the weekly Standard

Let's Drill

Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid, the Mr. Magoo of American politics, stumbled onto the truth last week. He discovered the law of supply and demand. "We want to put [more oil] on the market to increase supply and lower prices," Reid said. "With oil and gas prices continuing to break record highs every day, much more needs to be done."

Indeed it does. But Reid won't allow it. His understanding of economics only extends to matters in which he might embarrass President Bush. The oil he wants on the market is the oil the administration is buying for the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR), now nearly full. Reid got his way. The administration now plans to stop oil shipments to the SPR next month.

Beyond that, Reid and his party are committed to suppressing increased oil production in this country, as they wait for that magical day when fossil fuels are no longer needed to supply the nation's energy needs.

That day may come in 50, 60, 70 years—or never. In the meantime, America needs oil, and the good news is we're awash in the stuff. If the oil reserves miles off the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, in the eastern Gulf of Mexico, and in federally owned lands in the West and Alaska were tapped, our dependence on foreign oil could begin to be reversed. In 10 years, half of America's oil could be produced at home (up from 40 percent), with more coming from increased exports from Canada.

We wouldn't achieve energy independence. That's a pipedream, and anyway it isn't necessary in a global economy with multiple producers. But America would be taking a big step toward energy security and reducing the flow of dollars to unstable countries—notably Iran and Venezuela—that do not wish us well.

So more oil production would strengthen America's national security. By increasing the supply of oil, it would reduce the price, or at least ease the pressure on price from rising world demand. And the mere commitment to boosting production would have a soothing effect on a world market easily spooked by threats to supply.

But there's a problem: Eighty-five percent of the untapped domestic sources of oil have been put off-limits. There's a federally mandated moratorium on drilling offshore, and huge roadblocks to exploiting the oil on the vast federal lands have been erected.

"What keeps these areas closed are exaggerated environmental fears, strong prejudice against oil companies and sheer stupidity," wrote Robert Samuelson recently. Lifting the moratorium requires action by Congress and the White House. So don't hold your breath. The Democratic Congress is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environmental lobby, which regards oil exploration, much less drilling, as a sin against nature.

The United States is virtually alone in treating offshore production as taboo. Great Britain and Norway drill off their coasts without polluting the North Sea. China is now drilling at Cuba's behest in waters halfway to the coast of Florida.

Advances in technology, however, make serious offshore oil spills a thing of the past. One hundred eight platforms were destroyed and hundreds more damaged in the Gulf of Mexico by hurricanes Rita and Katrina without a single major spill. Californians may remember the damaging spill off Santa Barbara, but that was 40 years ago and was the result of ancient technology.

New technology also means the coastlines would not be marred by unsightly oil platforms. Drilling now goes miles deeper to capture oil once out of reach—and much farther offshore. The moratorium doesn't take this into account. It blindly bars drilling for 200 miles off the Atlantic and Pacific shores.

The United States is virtually alone in treating offshore production as taboo. Great Britain and Norway drill off their coasts without polluting the North Sea. Brazil has achieved energy independence not only by ethanol use but also by expanded offshore oil production. China is now drilling at Cuba's behest in waters halfway to the coast of Florida.

There's another compelling reason to boost domestic production. Oil from current sites is gradually being depleted. Unless new sources come on line in the next few years, America will produce less oil at home and become even more dependent on oil from abroad, the Middle East in particular.

Reid and Democrats, OPEC's best friends, aren't noticeably concerned. Their next step is to remove tax incentives to explore and drill for more oil. And Senator Hillary

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Clinton is eager to impose a new windfall profits tax on oil revenues. These measures have no purpose other than to punish oil companies. They are counterproductive.

When you remove incentives to produce something and when you slap higher taxes on its producers, one thing happens: You get less of the product. In the case of oil, we need more of it and will for the foreseeable future. The oil is there for the getting. But it won't come out of the ground on its own.

—Fred Barnes, for the Editors

UN to Burma: Drop Dead

There are natural disasters, and there are man-made disasters. Cyclones and earthquakes are, of course, natural. But the devastation wrought by a government's refusal to allow aid workers entry into crisis areas; by its confiscation of aid; by its diversion of resources so it can fix a referendum "legitimizing" its antidemocratic authority—that sort of disaster is man-made. And it requires a man-made response.

Cyclone Nargis swept Burma's Irrawaddy Delta weeks ago. It killed (at least) 80,000 people and put up to 2.5 million more at risk of disease and starvation. But the military junta that has ruled Burma since 1962 is only beginning to let foreign aid into the country. Rather than welcome and cooperate with international donors, the generals have dithered, postured, and placed tight restrictions on the manner in which aid is delivered to the destitute. Donors can hand over relief to the junta's agents. But they have neither control over nor knowledge of what those agents do with it afterward. The donors are blind. The generals are empowered. The Burmese people suffer and die.

This is intolerable. Every government, even the most despotic, has a responsibility to protect its people from this sort of situation. To do otherwise is criminal negligence. That is the unanimous consensus of the United Nations—Burma is a member—which in 2005 adopted the following resolution: "Each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. . . . The international community, through the United Nations, also has the responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means . . . to help protect populations. . . . [W]e are prepared to take collective action . . . should peaceful means be inadequate."

Strong words. Do they mean anything? French foreign minister Bernard Kouchner suggested that the "responsibility to protect" clause applies to Burma. The response was first silence, then criticism. His critics make two arguments. One is that the language of the "responsibility to protect" clause does not fit the current situation. The other is that the U.N. is powerless to intervene.

But these arguments are nothing more than rationales for ambivalence. A "crime against humanity" is usually the result of a deliberate action. But it can also be the result of inaction. And it is the junta's unwillingness to aid its oppressed population that rises to the level of such a crime.

Is the U.N. powerless? Only if it wants to be. The democracies on the Security Council won't introduce a resolution calling on the junta to accept aid because they expect China and possibly Russia to veto it. Why should they let themselves be bullied by the autocracies? Let the Security Council vote on such a resolution. Let China or Russia veto it. Let the world see who is willing to assist the afflicted Burmese and who is willing to stand in the way.

Simply holding a vote may pressure the junta to open Burma. If not, however, the aid should still flow. There are too many lives at stake to do nothing. Britain's Conservative leader David Cameron suggested airdropping aid directly to those in need. The military will confiscate some of the dropped aid. But not all of it. And the flags on the relief kits will show the Burmese people that they are not alone.

Robert D. Kaplan—no bleeding heart—wrote in the *New York Times* that "an enormous amount of assistance can be provided while maintaining a small footprint on shore." A distribution network independent from the government already exists in the saffron-robed monks who rose up against the junta last year. Meanwhile, we can establish safe havens along the coast and river deltas where aid can flow and where those desiring protection from the regime can gather. The allies established safe havens in Saddam Hussein's Iraq. They worked then. They'd work now.

All of this risks military confrontation with the junta. That is because it, not the cyclone, is Burma's true disaster. Hence the third part of an appropriate international response: rollback of the regime causing this tragedy. This does not mean invasion using conventional forces. The policy can be pursued by providing assistance to the Burmese opposition, by stepping up democracy promotion, by preparing indictments of regime leaders for crimes against humanity, by covert (and, yes, overt) action to disrupt the junta's command and control.

Risky? Sure. But assertiveness in the cause of natural right often decreases the chance of violence. Necessary? Absolutely. Conscience and justice demand it. So hold the vote. Drop the aid. And help the Burmese people overthrow the tyrants who allowed this tragedy to unfold.

—Matthew Continetti, for the Editors

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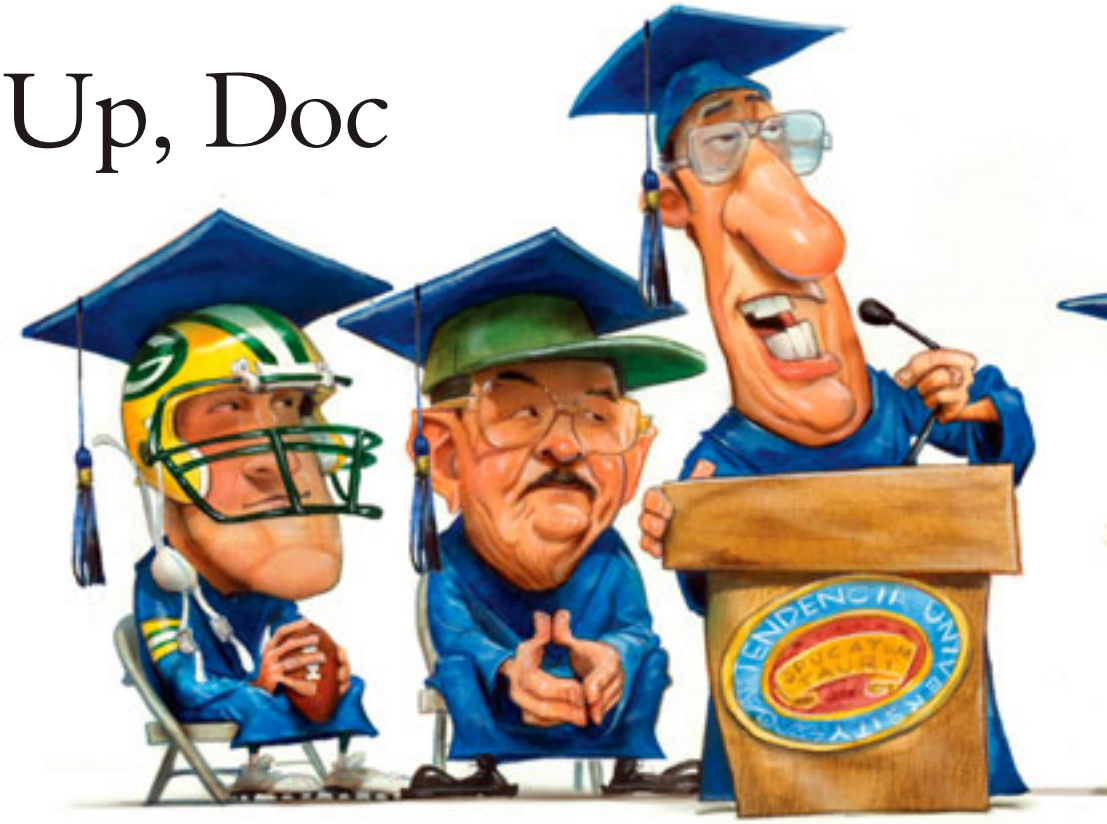
What's Up, Doc

The prestige of honorary degrees falls to record lows.



GARY LOCKE

BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN

Northwestern, the university where I taught for 30 years, appears to have caught its nether parts in a wringer. It seems they approached the Reverend Jeremiah Wright about accepting an honorary degree, and, now that Wright has made clear the kind of clergyman he is, Northwestern has withdrawn its offer. The president of the university, a man named Henry Bienen, in a letter to Reverend Wright, wrote that

> in light of the controversy surrounding statements made by you that have recently been publicized, the celebratory character of Northwestern's commencement would be affected by our conferring of this honorary degree. Thus I am withdrawing the offer of an honorary degree previously extended to you.

Universities, those most cowardly of modern institutions, are never more beguiling than when caught out not having the courage of their lack of conviction. One can imagine the delight of the man or woman in Northwestern's provost office when he or she discovered Jeremiah Wright's name and put him up for an honorary degree. For it wouldn't do, when passing out honorary degrees each spring, not to have one go to an African American, and by now surely Northwestern must have awarded honorary degrees to all the usual suspects: Toni Morrison, Bill Cosby, Maya Angelou, John Hope Franklin, et alia.

And then, as the song has it, Reverend Wright went and spoiled it all by saying something stupid: not I love you but that the United States government invented AIDS to kill poor black people. Imagine now the meeting at Northwestern where it was decided to withdraw the offer of an honorary degree to Wright, with all turning to the doofus who suggested Jeremiah Wright's name in the first place. ("A fine mess you've got us into this time, Stanley!") All those powerful minds devising ways to cover the university's fleshy but soft flanks. Although it left Northwestern with the burden of finding another African American in time for commencement, the conclusion was inevitable: Sorry, Rev, no honorary doctorate for you.

The larger problem, really, is the conferring of honorary degrees generally. The practice goes back to the 15th century; the first honorary degree was awarded by Oxford to the Bishop of Salisbury. For many centuries thereafter honorary degrees tended to be awarded to scholars and scientists and occasionally to artists. This remains the policy of the University of Chicago; no businessmen or politicians are given honorary degrees. The year President Clinton was the school's commencement speaker, the faculty agreed to allow him to speak only if he were awarded no honorary degree.

Benjamin Franklin became "Dr. Franklin" owing to honorary degrees given him by St. Andrews and by Oxford for his scientific work with electricity. Perhaps the world's most famous Dr., Samuel Johnson, was a Dr. by honorary degrees awarded him by Trinity College, Dublin, and by Oxford. Maya Angelou, who regularly refers to herself

Joseph Epstein is a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD. *His* Fred Astaire *will be published in September by the Yale University Press.*

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as "Dr. Angelou," has honorary doctorates only, and no undergraduate degree to go with them. As an African American and a woman, she may well have more honorary doctorates than anyone in the history of this strange ritual.

My late friend Sol Linowitz once told me that he had 64 such degrees. Linowitz combined modest fame for good works (he was ambassador to the Organization of American States) with heavy bread (he had been the chairman of the board at Xerox), which made him a near perfect candidate for an honorary degree: someone not disgraceful who just might donate a large sum to the school that had honored him.

Universities often award honorary degrees with such obvious motives in mind. Getting a rich person to drop some of his or her swag on them is only one. Sheer vulgar publicity is another. Many years ago my wife's school, DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana, gave an honorary degree to the newspaper columnist Erma Bombeck. When my wife wrote to the president of the school to suggest that doing so lowered the tone of the joint considerably, the president wrote back to say that Mrs. Bombeck gave a commencement talk full of laughs and that the talk was very well covered by the press. Case closed.

A cultural historian may one day be able to measure the fall from seriousness of American universities by tracking the people to whom they chose to award honorary degrees. The first step in this descent I noted was the awarding of such degrees to television journalists (Walter Cronkite, the man who has a face only a nation could love, must have a closet filled with the damn things). From there these degrees went to movie stars and television comedians. Northwestern, I know, has given honorary doctorates to Robert Redford and Julia Louis-Dreyfus. Yale gave one some years back to Meryl Streep. The motive here, at least in part, is to get a commencement address on the cheap, and to give the graduating students the right to say that at their commencement someone wildly famous spoke. Yet one wonders if the graduates of Long Island's Southampton College, allowed to reflect upon the matter in tranquility, were entirely pleased when their school gave an honorary degree to Kermit the Frog.

Controversy has surrounded the granting of honorary degrees from Oxford, Harvard, the Sorbonne in more recent years. Oxford went out of its way to refuse publicly to award such a one to Margaret Thatcher because she had severely cut university budgets in England. When in 2001 Yale granted an honorary degree to George W. Bush, one of its alumni, students and some faculty members refused to attend commencement in protest. Not a few universities have been caught by the twists of history, awarding an honorary degree to someone who later turns out to be a dictator or other species of political monster: the University of Edinburgh and the University of Massachusetts (Boston) conferred honorary degrees on Robert Mugabe that one may be sure they wished they hadn't.

The degree itself has never meant much but in recent years even the honor has been greatly diminished. The iron law of diversity has contributed to this in a significant way. No contemporary university dare not include women, African Americans, and other minority members among the honorary degree recipients at its annual commencement lest it be attacked for official bigotry. As soon as this harsh note of necessity enters the proceedings, distinction, and with it genuine prestige, departs.

Perhaps it is a little late to report that I have an honorary doctorate, though just one, and, let it be emphasized, from a not very famous school. I was also once called by the president of a university in Illinois, an institution whose name I cannot now recall, who asked if I would fill in for the person, recently become ill, who was supposed to give the school's commencement address. A modest fee was mentioned, and then the president added, "Of course, we'll toss in an honorary degree." I turned down the invitation but have never forgotten the phrase "toss in," and even now regret I didn't say to him that I'd much rather he toss in a rear-window defogger.

I like to think that I have personally warded off any more offers of honor-

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ary degrees by asserting, in print, that I'd rather have a sandwich named after me than an honorary degree from Oxford or any other institution of higher-learning.

So low has the prestige of honorary degrees fallen by being given to third- and fourth-class people that there are now even jokes about such degrees. One of the best is about the fabulously rich oil man, T-bone Tex Cunningham, who one day calls the office of the president of Southeast Texas A&M (at Langtry) to offer a donation of $100 million to the school. The president, in a mood of exultation at the size of the gift, asks T-bone if there is anything the school can do for him.

"As a matter of fact there is," the oil man replies. "I'd like an honorary doctorate for my favorite Arab stallion, Fertile Crescent by name."

"Mr. Cunningham," the president says, "I'm sure that this can be arranged without any difficulty at all."

At the next meeting of his board of trustees, the president of Southeast Texas A&M informs them of Cunningham's enormous gift and the request that goes with it. The trustees are, naturally enough, shocked by the request, but the president tells them not to worry, he'll bring it off just fine.

Commencement day in Langtry, seated on the stage behind the lectern are the recipients of the current year's honorary degrees: Amiri Baraka, Brett Favre, Raúl Castro, Germaine Greer, Yasser Arafat's son-in-law, and the horse. The president steps up to the podium, and begins:

> Students, faculty, parents, and friends of Southeast Texas A&M university, I am proud presently to announce this year's recipients of honorary degrees from our great institution. But before I do, I want to point out that our school is today making history, and you all should be very proud that Southeast Texas A&M is first in the nation to award an honorary doctorate to an *entire* horse.

I hope that, in consolation, the morning of Northwestern University's commencement, someone tells this joke to Reverend Jeremiah Wright. ♦

Dueling Redbaiters

A surprising development in the Democratic race.

BY RONALD RADOSH

As the Democratic primaries near their end, supporters of both Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama have used a time-honored yet unexpected device to attack each other: old-fashioned redbaiting.

At the Philadelphia presidential debate in April, George Stephanopoulos asked Obama about his relationship with the Weather Underground terrorist Bill Ayers, who with his comrades bombed several government buildings in the 1970s. Obama protested that he knew Ayers as a neighbor and professor of English (actually, he teaches education) whose "detestable acts" when Obama was eight were no reflection on "me and my values."

But as soon as it was her turn to speak, Obama's opponent piled on. Ayers and Obama had served together on the board of the Wood Foundation in "a paid directorship position," noted Clinton. It was legitimate to raise questions about their relationship, she insisted, since Ayers's bombings had resulted in people's deaths. This line of attack may have been shortsighted on Clinton's part, considering that her husband pardoned two imprisoned members of the Weather Underground before leaving office, but the Clinton campaign didn't back off.

Before you could say Comrade, Clinton's close adviser Sidney Blumenthal was emailing out blog posts, articles, and reports from a wide array of conservative sources. Blumenthal's missives went to "an influential list of opinion shapers—including journalists, former Clinton administration officials, academics, policy entrepreneurs, and think tankers," as the left-wing activist and professor Peter Dreier reported on the *Huffington Post* (May 1).

This was shocking in its own way. Blumenthal, the very man who coined the term "vast right-wing conspiracy," Dreier noted, by circulating articles from the conservative media, was attempting to exploit "that same right-wing network to attack and discredit Barack Obama."

Blumenthal sent out pieces from the ultra-conservative Accuracy in Media (AIM)—"With Obama, It's the Communism, Stupid," "Obama and the Fifth Column," "Is Barack Obama a Marxist Mole?"—as well as items from more mainstream conservative publications, such as a Fred Siegel cover story from *National Review*, Fred Barnes's "Republicans Root for Obama" from THE WEEKLY STANDARD, and an older *City Journal* article by Sol Stern reporting Bill Ayers's current role in developing a radical curriculum for K-12 teachers ("Ayers's texts on the imperative of social-justice teaching are among the most popular works in the syllabi of the nation's ed schools and teacher-training institutes").

Particularly grating to Obama supporters was Blumenthal's airing of AIM's allegation that Obama had sought to hide the influence a Communist mentor had on him as a young man. In his memoir, *Dreams From My Father*, Obama mentions a certain "Frank," a black poet friend of his white grandfather's who was

Ronald Radosh is an adjunct fellow at the Hudson Institute and the author of Commies: A Journey Through the Old Left, the New Left and the Leftover Left.

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a "contemporary of Richard Wright and Langston Hughes" and had once had "some notoriety." Frank gave the young Barack some "hard-earned knowledge" (such as that "black people have a reason to hate. That's just how it is"). As Obama set off for college, Frank told him that college was "an advanced degree in compromise" and that he should not "start believing what they tell you about equal opportunity and the American way."

It was easy for students of American communism to figure out that this was Frank Marshall Davis, a Chicago writer and Communist activist who moved to Hawaii in the late 1940s. That Davis sought to advise the young Obama as he prepared to leave home hardly proves that Davis was a major influence on Obama or that the young man accepted his Communist views. Obama's withholding of Davis's full name, however, does suggest that he worried it might cause him problems in his political career—as if Davis were another difficult uncle like Jeremiah Wright.

At one time, left/liberal people would have vigorously objected to all this redbaiting. But Obama's supporters responded in kind. Hadn't Clinton opened the door, as Bill Ayers's brother argued on the *Huffington Post* (April 17), by engaging in "the most base version of McCarthyism"? If Obama had left-wing connections in his youth, why not bring forward Clinton's own hidden past? Let's see who the real leftist is!

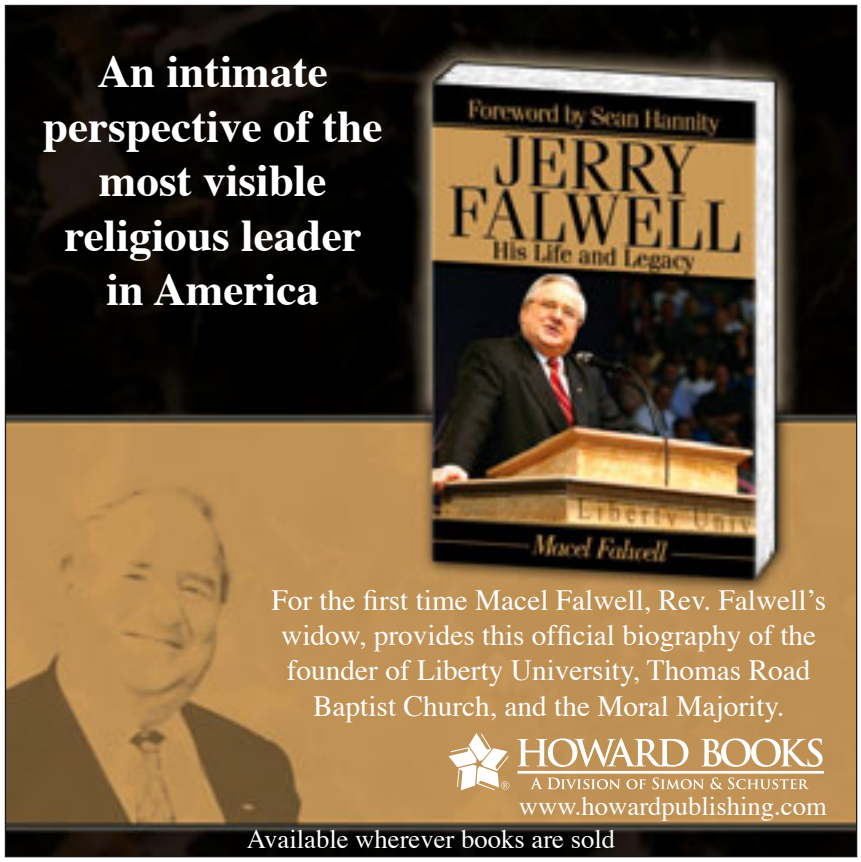
First to attack was New Left elder statesman Tom Hayden, who told readers of the *Nation* magazine's website (April 22) that Clinton herself had been as far left as one could get. And unlike Obama, she did not have the excuse of being eight years old when the New Left radicals were in their prime. Hayden revealed that Hillary "was in Chicago for three nights during the 1968 street confrontations" and that at Yale Law School in 1970 she chaired a meeting where students voted to join a national strike against the Vietnam war. The same year, during the trial of Black Panther leader Bobby Seale for murder, Clinton oversaw Yale law students who were following the proceedings and looking for signs of government misconduct. Most significantly, Hayden writes, Clinton went to work after law school for the San Francisco law firm that defended the Panthers, led by Robert Treuhaft, a former member of the Communist party.

Hayden, of course, sees these activities as "honorable" and asks a simple question: "Doesn't the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, whom Hillary attacks today, represent the very essence of the black radicals Hillary was associating with in those days?" Now she has become a "guilt-by-association insinuator," who is "engaged in a toxic transmission onto Barack Obama of every outrageous insult and accusation ever inflicted on her by the American right." Furious at this betrayal, Hayden calls her "Lady Macbeth."

Hayden's sally was followed by one from Clinton's biographer Carl Bernstein on the *Huffington Post* (May 2). What upset Bernstein was that Clinton was evading the truth about her own past radical activities and associations.

These began at Wellesley, Bernstein wrote, when "she exhibited an academic fascination with the Left and radicalism." Later at Yale she was associate editor of an alternative law review that depicted "policemen as pigs and murderers." Yet, notes Bernstein, in her 2003 memoir, Clinton breathed not a word of her activity on behalf of the Black Panthers, nor was she honest about why she went to work for the Robert Treuhaft law firm. Treuhaft told Bernstein that Clinton came to the firm because it was a "Movement law firm" and she was "in sympathy with all the Left causes." Treuhaft commented that back then, "we still weren't very far out of the McCarthy era." Bernstein adds, "And might still not be, to judge from the 2008 presidential campaign."

It is just as silly, Bernstein concludes, to tie Obama to the Weather Underground as it is to call Clinton



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a Stalinist. Yet Bernstein and the others have inadvertently opened up two legitimate lines of inquiry: What remains of their old radical ideals in both candidates' present thinking, and how far is each willing to go in exploiting the other's past? If scrutiny of these matters is fair game for them, it can hardly be off limits for the press and the voting public. ♦

A Medal for Brass

A brazen publicity stunt brought to you by the House of Saud. BY NINA SHEA

Already dogged by a reputation for promoting religious extremism abroad and repression at home, the government of Saudi Arabia now faces growing resentment at the soaring price of oil. As is their custom, Saudi rulers have responded with a public relations campaign. It's a campaign built on deception.

On May 8, Saudi royals placed a full-page ad in the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, the *Times* of London, and other papers proclaiming that a charity founded by Prince Alwaleed bin Talal al Saud, a nephew of King Abdullah and the world's 13th-richest person, had been honored by the pope. Directly under a Koranic passage on tolerance, the headline declared: "Alwaleed bin Talal Humanitarian Foundation, representing Kingdom Foundation, awarded the Pontifical Medal by Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican."

At the center of the page was depicted a medallion bearing the image of Pope Benedict XVI, which the ad labeled "The Pontifical Medal." The Holy See's coat of arms was displayed bottom center, implying that the ad carried the imprimatur of the pope.

All of this seemed unlikely on its face. Take that coat of arms. The ad labels it "The Vatican," a term never used by the Holy See to identify itself. More fundamentally, no church has yet been permitted in Saudi Arabia, a point the pope pressed with King Abdullah at a first-of-its-kind meeting last November. Nor does any great service to the Church figure among the benefactions for which Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal is best known—the check to New York City famously refused by Mayor Giuliani after 9/11; the gifts to the Carter Center and the presidential library of George H.W. Bush; the donations to universities like Harvard and Georgetown which now boast "Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Centers" for Islamic studies.

But then, what was going on? Neither the American mainstream press nor the Catholic press had reported any papal decoration of a Saudi prince. A search of the Holy See's website turned up nothing. Most Google hits for "Pontifical Medal" were Arabic papers' echoes of the very PR material presented in the ad. And official listings of the honors awarded by the Vatican—knighthoods in the Orders of St. Gregory the Great and the Holy Sepulcher, for example—made no mention of the medal shown.

Besides, why would the Vatican confer a high honor on this Saudi prince? A Catholic knighthood normally requires a recommendation from the local bishop, and Saudi Arabia tolerates no "local" bishops or Christian clergy of any kind. Repeated calls to the Vatican embassy and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington and to the Holy See's press office in Rome brought no clarification.

In the end, it was consultations with an independent expert on the Vatican and interviews with several recipients that solved the mystery: The medal shown in the ad is a common souvenir.

It is minted each year by the thousand and handed out as a memento to those granted an audience with the pope. All the staffers at the American embassy to the Holy See, for instance, have received it. It was given to White House officials when Pope Benedict met with Bush. It is for sale at the Vatican bookstore. It confers no honor at all.

Perhaps Prince Talal came by the medallion through his aunt, the vice president of his Beirut-based foundation, which has been generous to Lebanese Catholics. On March 12, she met the pope in Rome, and a photograph of their encounter appears in the ad. Although the caption claims the picture shows Pope Benedict "awarding the Pontifical Medal" to the prince's aunt "in recognition of her distinguished social and humanitarian work," an uncropped version of the same picture found online makes clear the two are merely shaking hands. This is a bit like portraying an Oval Office photo op as the awarding of a Presidential Medal of Freedom.

What can have prompted such reckless misrepresentation? A fair surmise is that the answer lies partly in the royal family's eagerness to deflect criticism from Saudi philanthropy in the West.

Thus, in 2005, Prince Alwaleed bin Talal gave $20 million to Georgetown University for a center within its Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service. The ad specifically mentions Georgetown's now-renamed Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, as if it were somehow covered by the pope's purported commendation. The center is controversial.

Last December, the *Washington Times* published an article under the headline "Saudis buy a campus presence; Georgetown shares in largesse to fund Islamic studies programs." Noting that Harvard, Duke, and Berkeley were also beneficiaries of Saudi dona-

Nina Shea is director of the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom.

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tions, the piece raised concerns that these gifts were "creating bastions of noncritical pro-Islamic scholarship within academia."

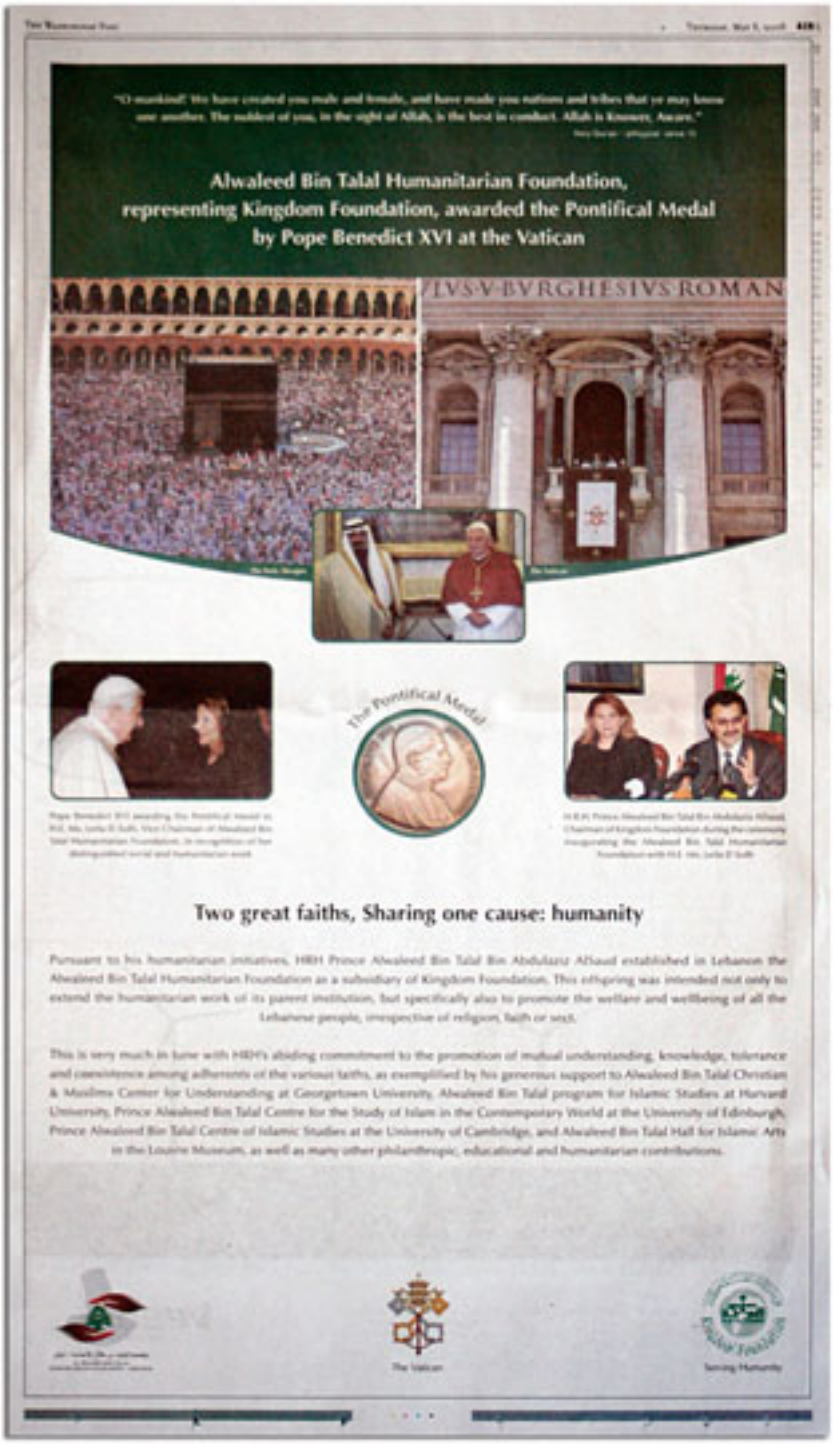
Some on Capitol Hill agreed. Representative Frank Wolf, ranking member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee for the State Department, home of the Foreign Service, took up the issue with Georgetown president John DeGioia. In a February 14 letter, Wolf asked whether the center could maintain "the impartiality and integrity of scholarship that befits so distinguished a university as Georgetown and that is required by the exigencies of national security for training American officials." Meanwhile, Saudi subsidizing of Western universities proceeds apace. Only this month, Cambridge University and the University of Edinburgh each announced the creation of an Islamic studies center funded by and named after Prince Alwaleed bin Talal.

But if the ad's immediate purpose may have been to cast the appearance of a papal blessing over the growing Saudi presence on Western campuses, it also served a larger Saudi aim. The Saudi monarchy has begun using the model of the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church to position itself as the authoritative voice of Islam worldwide. This is new. In the history of Sunni Islam, theological authority has been located in various centers, but never in the House of Saud.

In 2006, the Saudi ambassador to the United States, in a letter to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, quoted the king as referring to his government as the "Vatican of Islam." The implication is that Saudi Arabia is not only hallowed ground as host of the two holiest Muslim sites, but also the arbiter of Islamic orthodoxy.

The recent ad directly supports this power play. It sets up visual parallels between the pope and the king, the Vatican and Mecca. A slogan at the bottom reads, "Two great faiths, Sharing one cause: humanity." Using its control of the *hajj* and the vast wealth it pours into foreign evangelism, funding mosques, schools, libraries, and academic centers worldwide, the House of Saud is patiently pursuing its quest to make the Saudi variant of Islam—Wahhabism, with its warrant for the murder of heretics, apostates, and infidels—the Muslim norm. This is the ad's chilling subtext.

The latest Saudi publicity stunt should not be dismissed as merely a boorish hoax. It offers a useful glimpse of the ambitions and methods of the Saudi state, which deserve to be taken seriously. ♦



The full-page ad in the May 8 Washington Post

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Our Hopeless Energy Policy

Bad questions lead to bad answers.

BY IRWIN M. STELZER

Students of energy policy despair, and at times believe that Dante's inscription on the entrance to hell should be emblazoned on the entrances to the Capitol and the White House, "Abandon hope all ye who enter here."

Our president has just gone to Saudi Arabia to grovel before the royal family in the hope of persuading the kingdom to open its taps just a bit to bring soaring oil prices down. The caribou lobby in the Senate has voted down a bill that would have opened a small portion of Alaska's untapped oil fields to exploration and development. (Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama voted to continue the restriction, and John McCain would have joined them had he not been out of town reveling in the applause for his speech promising to lead the fight on global warming.) And the farm and ethanol lobbies are prepared to crush the groups calling for an end to the food-for-fuel mandate that requires motorists to use nine billion gallons of ethanol (auto fuel made from corn) this year.

A good part of the energy policy muddle stems from a tendency to ask the wrong questions. Ask the wrong questions, and you get the wrong answers. The question now being asked by Hillary Clinton, John McCain, and other politicians whose notion of the long run extends only for the six months until the November election is, "How can we lower gasoline prices?" Their answer: Reduce the approximately 18 cent-per-gallon federal tax on gasoline during the summer driving season. The reasons that is exactly the wrong policy are too many to list. One is that oil producers, or oil companies, or service station operators would raise prices by an equivalent amount. Hillary Clinton, in her new populist incarnation, might dismiss this as the ranting of pointy-headed economists, but it is nevertheless true. But give the pandering pols the benefit of the doubt, and assume that prices would go down. The right question would have been, "Is it good policy to lower gasoline prices?" The right answer is "no."

Higher prices seem to be persuading Americans to use less gasoline, witness the increased use of mass transit reported in many cities around the country. Lower gasoline prices would encourage Americans to drive more, use more of the cheaper gasoline, emit more pollutants, and increase the demand for crude oil. So regimes hostile to the United States would sell us still more oil. Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, whose government owns some 8,000 Citgo gasoline stations in America, must be astonished to learn that leading American politicians are eager to increase his revenues so that he can step up his propaganda campaign against America. And the Saudi financiers of jihadists and of the Wahabbi mullahs who fuel anti-Americanism would be pleased to have a few extra hundred million. So would Vladimir Putin. Better that, figure our politicians, than to take the political risk of increasing taxes on gasoline, reducing demand, and getting to the consumers' wallets before OPEC and its allies do.

The wrong question—how do we lower prices?—also led Congress last week to pass legislation ordering the president to stop buying oil for the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. The reserve now contains 701.3 million barrels, a record. Bush wants to fill it to its capacity of 727 million barrels this year, and eventually double the capacity. Stop buying oil, critics, including John McCain, tell President Bush, and demand pressures will ease. Better still, start selling off some of the strategic reserve, and increase supplies of crude oil. The notion that the government can outsmart the market by buying low and selling high is, to put it mildly, questionable. As is the assumption that it is smart enough to distinguish a shock, which might justify use of the reserve, from a trend, which should be allowed to play itself out so that the economy can readjust to the new prices. Besides, oil companies are likely to increase their own inventories when the government stops stockpiling, stepping up purchases of imported crude oil in order to do so. Net effect of all of this on demand and supply: nil. Net effect on our ability to withstand a supply cutoff: substantial.

Next wrong question, and one being asked not only in America, but in most other countries: "How can we replace crude oil with renewable sources of energy?" Answer: Subsidize construction of wind turbines, solar panels, nuclear plants, and the production of corn. But neither wind turbines nor solar energy, on the cheeriest of assumptions, can make a significant dent in the demand for crude oil and its products. As for nuclear, few of these costly plants—and cost estimates seem to be doubling every few months—will be built unless overt or covert subsidies are offered to private-sector players, licensing proceedings and construction times are shortened, and politicians are willing to override Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid to allow the opening of the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste depository.

Which leaves corn. Congress has mandated that farmers be paid huge subsidies to grow corn to be converted into ethanol, a gasoline substitute,

Irwin M. Stelzer is a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard, *director of economic policy studies at the Hudson Institute, and a columnist for the* Sunday Times *(London).*

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while quite inconsistently maintaining a tariff wall to deny motorists access to cheaper imported ethanol. The answer produced by the wrong question has serious negative consequences. For one thing, the negative environmental impact of these biofuels seems to outweigh their positive effect. Among other things, production requires the use of huge amounts of fertilizers, causing run-off that pollutes streams and rivers; farmers around the world cut down environmentally friendly forests to increase planting of oil-substitutes; and acreage previously devoted to growing food is converted to growing fuel. That has contributed to the massive increases in food prices that are afflicting not only Americans but, with greater ferocity, the world's poor. In essence, rich countries are trying to fill their gasoline tanks at the expense of empty stomachs in Africa, Central America, and parts of Asia.

So what are the right questions? First, have any of the programs now in place proved counterproductive? Yes, several have costs that exceed their benefits. Best example: the attempt to grow our way out of the energy problem. Admit that we have erred, and wind down the subsidies that are denuding forests and contributing to food shortages without significantly adding to fuel supplies. That's what a coalition of environmentalists, livestock producers, and consumer groups last week called on Congress to do. They are unlikely to overcome the powerful farmer-ethanol lobby.

Second, are there cost-effective ways of increasing the supply of conventional crude oil? Probably. Studies that showed that the environmental cost of drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Reserve and offshore Florida and California exceeded any benefit from new discoveries are now out of date. The benefits were estimated when oil prices were less than half current levels. So the benefits of stepped up exploration have multiplied with the price and value of oil. Meanwhile, the industry claims to have learned a great deal about reducing the environmental impact of such stepped-up drilling. If new studies bear out these impressions, and suggest that the environmental and other costs of drilling are now exceeded by their benefits, restrictions on domestic drilling should be relaxed. But that is not in the cards—all three of the presidential wannabes are pledged to keep Alaska closed to drilling, no matter what the balance of costs and benefits.

Fill 'er up with corn: an Iowa ethanol plant

MITCH KEZAR / PHOTOTAKE

Final sensible question, Can anything be done to increase supplies of oil from the world's important suppliers? Answer: Yes, if there is the will to act. The Mexican government depends heavily on remittances sent to poor Mexican families from the millions of its citizens working, legally and illegally, in the United States; the Saudi regime depends on the U.S. military umbrella for its survival; and the Saudi-led OPEC cartel, which has held production constant for eight months in the face of a 54 percent increase in prices, exists only because successive administrations have prevented the antitrust authorities from attempting to break it up. Hillary Clinton is on to something when she calls for antitrust action against this cartel, which would not be the first time the Justice Department has moved against a price-fixing conspiracy by foreign firms. Antitrust lawyers tell me that the immunity of sovereign governments from antitrust prosecution does not extend to their commercial activities.

Bush knows this. He knows that nothing frightens the Saudi regime more than the threat of the furling of the U.S. umbrella, which as Karen Elliott House put it in the *Wall Street Journal*, "has provided the Saudis with a security blanket that puts this desert kingdom off limits to regional predators" and prevented Iran and Syria from turning Saudi Arabia into another Lebanon. He knows that the Saudis have about two million barrels per day of shut-in, excess capacity. And he knows how vulnerable the Saudi-led OPEC cartel is to antitrust action. Perhaps he worries that if he deploys any of these weapons the Saudis will dump some part of their dollar pile on the market, driving down the value of our currency, and increasing inflationary pressures and interest rates in America. They might, but only if they are willing to drive down the value of the billions of dollars remaining in their vaults, and damage the value of their U.S. investments. Would the president of the United States or the king of Saudi Arabia be the first to blink in a stare down? We will never know, since the adminis-

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tration prefers the role of supplicant to that of tough bargainer.

Nor is there any indication that we are prepared to harden our line with Mexico. No one has suggested that Mexico's continued refusal to allow American capital to flow into its oil industry might be considered when NAFTA is reviewed. Is it unreasonable to suggest that free trade in goods and services, and the virtually unhindered movement of labor across the border, must be accompanied by the free flow of capital across borders? Yes, we benefit from NAFTA, and its abrogation would impose costs on us. But so does Mexico's ban on U.S. participation in its oil industry.

A serious American administration would explain to the Saudis and their OPEC allies, and to the Mexicans, that continuation of their present policies would not be without cost to them. Continued defense of the Saudi regime, a staying of the hand of the antitrust authorities, and continued absence of restrictions on remittances to Mexico will, they should be told, depend at least in part on their willingness to allow Western firms to develop new reserves and to wring more oil from existing fields, and to relax cartel restrictions on current output.

Unfortunately, the right questions are precisely the sorts of questions that politicians abhor. Asking them produces politically difficult answers—higher not lower taxes on gasoline to encourage new technologies and discourage consumption, the opening of now-closed areas to exploration and development, the end of massive subsidies to farmers to grow corn-for-fuel.

Wrong questions and the inevitably wrong policy answers might be one reason Goldman Sachs is talking about a "super spike" that would take oil prices to $200 per barrel. Remember: These are the guys who were laughed at when they predicted that the price of oil would hit $100. Dante might have been referring to what happens to good ideas on energy policy when they are sent to the halls of Congress or the White House, when he wrote, "Through me you pass into the city of woe . . . into eternal pain." ♦

California's Gift to McCain?

The state supreme court imposes same-sex marriage. BY JOHN MCCORMACK

Eight years ago, 4,618,673 California voters—61 percent of those casting ballots—approved an initiative that stated: "Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California." Last Thursday, four of the seven justices of the California supreme court struck down that law, ruling that it violates the "fundamental constitutional right to form a family relationship."

California chief justice Ronald George, writing for the majority, declared that "an individual's sexual orientation—like a person's race or gender—does not constitute a legitimate basis upon which to deny or withhold legal rights" and therefore "the California Constitution properly must be interpreted to guarantee this basic civil right to all Californians, whether gay or heterosexual, and to same-sex couples as well as to opposite-sex couples."

"It looks like a fairly conventional liberal judicial activist decision," says Princeton professor of jurisprudence Robert P. George. "These guys had the votes, and they rammed it through. They don't regard the will of the people of California as worthy of their particular concern."

Like the Massachusetts supreme court, which redefined marriage contrary to the will of the people in 2004, the California court has thrust the issue of same-sex marriage upon the nation in the midst of a presidential race. Within hours of the decision, Barack Obama's campaign issued a statement saying that the candidate

> respects the decision of the California Supreme Court, and continues to believe that states should make their own decisions when it comes to the issue of marriage.

Then the McCain camp fired back:

> John McCain supports the right of the people of California to recognize marriage as a unique institution sanctioning the union between a man and a woman, just as he did in his home state of Arizona. John McCain doesn't believe judges should be making these decisions.

By supporting the court's decision, Obama exposed a number of vulnerabilities. McCain might ask, What exactly would preclude the U.S. Supreme Court, refreshed with a couple of Obama appointees, from declaring same-sex marriage a constitutional right in all 50 states? And if laws against same-sex marriage are just like laws against interracial marriage, as the California court declared, then what would stop the government from treating those who oppose same-sex marriage like racists?

Indeed, says Professor George, the next logical step will be to use "anti-discrimination laws as weapons" primarily against religious institutions and individuals who refuse to recognize same-sex marriage. In the eyes of the law, George says, they'll be "treated as bigots." For example, after the Massachusetts same-sex marriage decision in 2004, Catholic Charities shut down its adoption services rather than comply with a government order to place

John McCormack, a Collegiate Network fellow, is an editorial assistant at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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children with same-sex couples.

In California, conflicts between religious liberty and gay rights have already reached the courts. In a case to be heard May 28 by the California supreme court, two Christian doctors are being sued for refusing to artificially inseminate a lesbian, and last summer four firefighters sued the city of San Diego on sexual harassment grounds after they were required to participate in a gay pride parade over their objections. How would California deal with doctors who refused to treat an African American? Revoke their licenses. How would San Diego treat firefighters who objected to marching in a Martin Luther King Jr. parade? Fire them.

A voter initiative on marriage in California—to amend the state constitution with wording identical to the 2000 measure—appears to have enough signatures to make it onto this November's ballot. Such an amendment would trump last week's decision. Prior to the ruling, the state of California already provided virtually the same tangible benefits and legal rights for same-sex domestic partners as for husbands and wives, so the debate in California may focus on the threat that the court's decision poses to religious liberty.

A strong enough voter backlash in California has a chance of putting the state's electoral votes in play: A Rasmussen poll in April showed McCain trailing Obama by 7 percentage points. The issue could also bolster McCain's support in Florida—the only other state with a marriage amendment on the ballot this year—where a RealClearPolitics average of polls shows McCain leading Obama by nine points.

There's no guarantee, however, that either of these initiatives will pass or necessarily have a spillover effect in McCain's favor. Though 27 states have passed marriage amendments to their state constitutions, 2006 saw the first defeat by the voters of such an amendment—in McCain's home state of Arizona. That same year, Colorado gay rights activist Tim Gill gave $15 million in political donations and organized activists to donate millions more, mostly to defeat state legislators who oppose same-sex marriage. Now, same-sex marriage proponents are planning to flood California with campaign cash. Brian Brown, executive director of the National Organization for Marriage, the fledgling organization leading the fight for this fall's marriage amendment in California, estimates that their campaign will need at least $10 million to succeed in a state with some of the most expensive media markets in the country.

Though McCain caught flak from social conservatives in 2004 for opposing a federal amendment defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman, Brown says that McCain's speaking out in favor of the California initiative and articulating his judicial philosophy in this context would resonate with voters.

But it will be up to McCain himself to draw the contrast between his positions and Obama's. The media are content to say that the candidates "are pretty much in agreement" on marriage, as the *New York Times* reported, since both favor legal protections for same-sex couples and oppose same-sex marriage as well as the federal marriage amendment.

McCain opposed the federal amendment partly because the federal Defense of Marriage Act—which McCain supports and Obama opposes—already defines marriage as between a man and a woman; it also says that a state is not required to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states.

In light of the California court's ruling, McCain may be more open to supporting a federal amendment, which would prevent either state or federal courts from redefining marriage, though it's unclear whether he's considered such a move to forestall judicial activism. What's certain is that the ballot initiative this November in California—where one out of every eight U.S. citizens lives—will keep this issue alive whether the candidates like it or not. ♦

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Red as in Rust

Russia's collapsing military-industrial complex.

BY REUBEN F. JOHNSON

AFP PHOTO / DMITRY KOSTYUKOV

Novosibirsk, Russia

Russia's May 9 Victory Day was marked this year with more than normal fanfare and a massive show of military hardware rolling through Red Square—the first such display of weaponry on this holiday since the end of the Soviet empire. Standing on a special platform to review the parade—in front of a Lenin's tomb covered in bunting and Russian flags—were newly inaugurated president, Dmitri Medvedev, and his predecessor, and now prime minister, Vladimir Putin.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union the traditional Communist celebrations have faded. But May 9 continues to have historic resonance for the Russian people. Soviet losses in the war against Nazi Germany were between 20 and 30 million, the country's industrial base and infrastructure were left in ruins, and the nation was nearly bankrupt. It took decades to recover from the wholesale destruction.

Still, the 63rd anniversary is not a *kruglaya data*, as the Russians refer to nice, round-numbered 40, 50, or 60-year anniversaries, so no special celebration would seem to have been warranted this year, much less tanks, armored personnel carriers, and mobile ballistic missile launchers rolling through the streets.

The reasons for such a grand public spectacle were twofold. One was that Medvedev had been inaugurated only two days before on May 7, so the military show was a way of signifying the transfer of power to the new president and a demonstration that Russia remains a strong and united nation.

The other, more significant motivation was the culmination of the Putin regime's years-long crusade to send a message to the world that Moscow is once again a great military power—that it intends to challenge the West at every possible juncture.

This military posturing has manifested itself in a number of ways. Russian strategic bombers have begun flying patrols near NATO airspace again, for the first time since the end of the Cold War. In early February, a Russian bomber patrol buzzed a U.S. carrier battle group in the Pacific—violating Japanese airspace in the process. During April's NATO summit, Putin

Reuben F. Johnson writes frequently on Russian politics.

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reportedly threw a temper tantrum and threatened that he would cause Ukraine to "cease to exist as a state" should the former Soviet republic attempt to join NATO. Russia's *Kommersant* newspaper, quoting a diplomat who witnessed the spectacle, reported that Putin threatened to encourage the secession of the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea and eastern Ukraine, areas where the population are pro-Moscow.

The story is easy to believe because Putin threatened far worse earlier in the year. In a joint press conference with Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko in February, Putin threatened his neighbor with nuclear annihilation if it allowed NATO to establish bases there. "It is frightening not only to talk about this, but even to think that, in response to such [NATO] deployments . . . and one can't theoretically exclude these deployments, Russia would have to point its warheads at Ukraine," he said.

But for all of the bluster, Russia's military hardware is aging and decaying before our eyes, whether it is chugging through Red Square or flying at 2,000 feet above a U.S. carrier's flight deck. Defense attachés and intelligence officers assigned to Moscow used to live for these military parades, which sometimes gave them a chance for a first glimpse of some new weapon system. But there was certainly nothing to get excited about in the latest parade.

"If they wish to take out their old equipment and take it for a spin, and check it out, they're more than welcome to do so," said Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morrell at a press conference. Russian military observers were even more dismissive. "Our armed forces today are merely a bad copy of the Soviet Army," said retired General Vladimir Dvorkin in an interview with the Associated Press.

The steep decline of the Russian military began in the 1990s when orders for Russia's defense screeched to a halt during the Yeltsin era. But the "happy days are here again" era of $100 per barrel oil under Putin has not brought a cornucopia of new orders from the Russian ministry of defense. Procurement of new fighters and other systems has been anemic; most of the budget allocated for aerospace R&D has been diverted from military projects to the development of the Sukhoi Superjet 100, a regional passenger airliner. Meanwhile the Tupolev Tu-95s that were sent to buzz the Nimitz battle group in the Pacific are a design that is more than 50 years old.

Most weapons systems in the Russian arsenal today are warmed over versions of designs that were made in the Soviet period. Remarkably few innovations have been turned out since then, and almost none that are anywhere close to production status. This is a direct result of Moscow—despite all of its new-found wealth—turning off the investment spigot to the R&D centers of the defense industry.

Most weapons systems in the Russian arsenal today are warmed over versions of designs that were made in the Soviet period. Remarkably few innovations have been turned out since then.

Under Yeltsin the drying up of R&D funding was arguably a case of benign neglect, but under Putin—and now Medvedev—the state seems strangely determined to starve its defense industry, perhaps because it is not a power center for Putin and his St. Petersburg cronies.

One of Russia's premier institutions of scientific excellence is the Siberia Aeronautical Research Institute (SibNIA) in Novosibirsk. A discussion with the senior staff there tells the tale. "Our yearly budget is about 400 million rubles [$17 million], but of this sum we only receive 20 million rubles—5 percent—from the government," a SibNIA official tells me. "The rest we have to go find ourselves by doing work for foreign customers or commercial projects like the Superjet. If the government wanted defense and aerospace technology to really advance in this country we and other institutes like ours would be fully state-funded as NASA is in the United States, and we would not be knocking on doors all the time with a tin cup in one hand."

But Moscow's failure to invest is only part of the story. The senior officials appointed by Putin now want to kick all of Russia's designers and engineers out of their design bureaus and institutes in Moscow and move them out to a new national design center in the city of Zhukovsky, which is some 25 miles from the far southeast edge of Moscow.

The official rationale for this move is that it places all of these experienced personnel into one facility and thereby creates synergism. A better explanation is that Putin's cronies want the land these defense facilities sit on in central Moscow, which is worth untold millions to real estate developers.

This is a move that will kill off what remains of Russia's defense industrial base. Most of the personnel still working at these design centers are pushing 60 or more. "None of these people will make the move all the way out to Zhukovsky," says one of the SibNIA senior researchers. "Most of them would rather retire than submit to a two-hour—each direction—commute every day across the whole of Moscow.

No one in Moscow officialdom seems particularly bothered by the collateral damage from this real estate scam. All they care about is how much money they are going to be able to stuff in their pockets. The fact that there may soon be no one left to build the weapons the Russian military needs is at most a minor inconvenience.

Which may be another reason for the parade of tanks returning to Red Square after a 17-year hiatus. These old weapons are nearing the day when they will no longer be considered modern. Better to show them off one more time, before they become museum pieces. ♦

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A Conspiracy So Lunatic . . .

Only '60 Minutes' could fall for it.

BY JOHN H. HINDERAKER

Jill Simpson is an unusual woman. A lawyer, she has scratched out an uncertain living in DeKalb County, Alabama. Fellow DeKalb County lawyers describe her as "a very strange person" who "lives in her own world." The daughter of rabid Democrats, she has rarely if ever been known to participate in politics as even a low-level volunteer. Yet today, she is a minor celebrity who is unvaryingly described in the press as a "Republican operative." Those who know her in DeKalb County scoff at the idea that she is a Republican at all.

Recently, Simpson's house and law office were on the auction block. Rumor has it that she is leaving DeKalb County for good and heading for the suburbs of Washington, D.C. Jill Simpson, who barely got by in Alabama, is now toasted by the national Democratic party and featured on network and cable news. All this because she has testified—without a shred of supporting evidence—to a conspiracy so vast as to be not just implausible, but ridiculous.

Simpson claims to have participated in a phone conversation with several Alabama Republicans in which she was made privy to a plot involving the Republican governor of Alabama, Bob Riley, a former justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, a federal judge, two United States attorneys, several assistant United States attorneys, the Air Force, and, apparently 12 jurors, to "railroad" former governor Don Siegelman into his 2006 conviction for bribery and mail fraud. Every person whose name Simpson has invoked has labeled her story a fantasy, including Siegelman; she claimed to have played a key role both in his giving up his unsuccessful contest of the 2002 gubernatorial election and in his defense of the criminal charges against him.

John H. Hinderaker is a contributor to the blog Power Line.

Normally, one might expect a person of uncertain mental health who alleged such a comprehensive conspiracy to be ushered quietly offstage. Instead, in late February, CBS's '60 Minutes' gave her a starring role.

Normally one might expect a person of uncertain mental health who alleged such a comprehensive conspiracy to be ushered quietly offstage. Instead, in late February, CBS's *60 Minutes* gave her a starring role. This can be explained only by the fact that Simpson included in her fable, as she related it to CBS, a final conspirator: Karl Rove, who, according to Simpson, orchestrated the plot against Siegelman.

In her *60 Minutes* interview, Simpson claimed to have been Rove's secret agent in Alabama. She said that during Siegelman's term as governor of Alabama, Rove had asked her to follow Siegelman around and try to get photographs of him "in a compromising sexual position" with one of his aides. This led to one of the great moments in recent broadcast history:

60 Minutes's Scott Pelley: Were you surprised that Rove made this request?
Simpson: No.
Pelley: Why not?
Simpson: I had had other requests for intelligence before.
Pelley: From Karl Rove?
Simpson: Yes.

Pelley was at a crossroads: He knew that either (1) he was on the verge of uncovering a whole series of Rovian plots, the stuff of which Pulitzers are made, or (2) he was talking to a lunatic. Intuiting, no doubt, which way the conversation was likely to go, Pelley discreetly chose not to inquire further.

Simpson can offer no evidence that she has ever spoken to or met Karl Rove. Moreover, when she told her story of the alleged conspiracy against Don Siegelman to John Conyers's House Judiciary Committee staff, she said that she heard references to someone named "Carl" in the aforementioned telephone conversation—she made the natural inference that this must be Karl Rove—but never offered the blockbuster claim that Rove himself had recruited her to spy on Siegelman. Neither in the affidavit that she submitted to the committee, nor in 143 pages of sworn testimony that she gave to the committee's staff, did she ever claim to have met Karl Rove, spoken to Karl Rove, or carried out any secret spy missions on his behalf, even though the whole point of her testimony was to try to spin out a plot against Siegelman that was ostensibly led by someone named "Carl."

60 Minutes chose to highlight Simpson's claim that she was Rove's secret agent without telling its viewers that this sensational allegation had been altogether absent from her sworn accounts. Subsequently, MSNBC's Dan Abrams invited Simpson to repeat her slur against Rove. This prompted Rove to write to Abrams, posing a series of questions about whether Abrams had used elementary journalistic methods to check the accuracy of Simpson's account.

Rove's letter drew a response from Abrams:

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[Y]ou wrote, "Did it not bother you Ms. Simpson failed to mention [in her sworn statement to House Judiciary Committee staff] the claim she made to CBS for their Feb. 24, 2008 story, that you then repeated on Feb. 25th?"

Fair question. Which is why I asked her the following on Feb. 25, 2008:

ABRAMS: And why have you never mentioned before the allegations of Rove and the pictures? . . .

SIMPSON: Well, let me explain something to you. I talked to congressional investigators, Dan. And when I talked to those congressional investigators I told them that I had followed Don Siegelman and tried to get pictures of him cheating on his wife.

However, they suggested to me that that was not relevant because there was nothing illegal about that and they'd just prefer that not come up at the hearing that day.

Put aside the fact that before she was interviewed by House Democratic staffers, Simpson submitted an affidavit on the alleged conspiracy. In her affidavit, she did not claim that she had ever met Rove, let alone been his secret agent in Alabama. What MSNBC found plausible was Simpson's suggestion that House Democratic staffers got their hands on the story that Karl Rove had tried to get compromising photographs of the governor of Alabama and they hushed it up! The credulity of modern journalists apparently knows no bounds.

Simpson's story is unbelievable and contradictory on so many levels that it cannot bear a moment's inspection. (Wholly unexplained, for example, is why, if Rove or anyone else wanted to spy on the governor of Alabama, he would assign the task to a conspicuously large redhead with no experience as an investigator and no ties to the Republican party, rather than hire a professional investigator.) But that has not prevented her from being hailed as a hero by the Democratic party. Citing her testimony, John Conyers has threatened to subpoena Karl Rove to testify before his committee. Siegelman himself has called her a "great American," while simultaneously acknowledging that her story, insofar as it claims a relationship with him, is false.

Siegelman's embrace of Simpson is understandable. He is facing seven years in a federal prison; any port in a storm. But what explains CBS's and MSNBC's decision to peddle her fable?

Karl Rove has become the man who cannot be libeled. Any story that includes his name is treated as self-authenticating, requiring neither supporting evidence nor the barest plausibility. Having committed the unforgivable sin of contributing to two successful Republican presidential campaigns, Rove has become, for American media, the equivalent of an outlaw, possessing no rights that must be respected. ♦

Michael Ramirez

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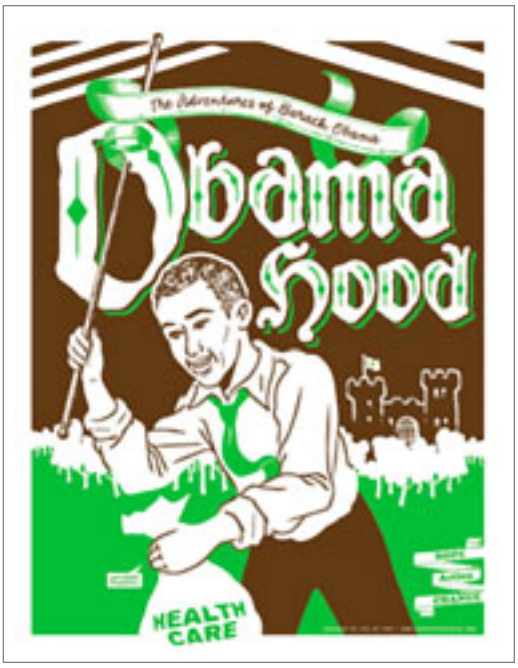
Let a Thousand Posters Bloom

Artists and designers have flocked to the Obama Campaign, depicting their man as everything from a saint to Chairman Mao.

An official Obama '08 campaign poster



By Jonathan V. Last

More than any other politician in recent memory, Barack Obama has been the subject of iconography. His campaign's official posters often portray Obama in a beatific light—clad in a white shirt and silver tie, eyes squinting and looking into some middle distance above the camera, a nimbus of wispy clouds illuminating his sacred head. But even away from the Obama mother ship, graphic designers and pop artists have adopted the candidate as their own, producing a raft of posters and prints in support of his campaign.

Jonathan V. Last is a staff writer at The Weekly Standard.

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'Obamahood' (far left), 'The Dream,' and 'Speaking to U.S.' are among the prodigious output of Chicago-based graphic artist Ray Noland, whose self-described 'independent political propaganda campaign' is headquartered at gotellmama.org.

Last summer, an Obama poster began appearing in downtown Chicago, plastered randomly in public spaces. Drawn in mustardy yellows, Obama appeared from the shoulders up, staring straight at viewers, with a sunburst exploding behind his head. Below the image, in large block letters, the poster proclaimed "The Dream." At the time, the artist was identified only as "CRO," but, as the posters spread, CRO was revealed to be Ray Noland, a 35-year-old graphic artist.

Noland has admired Obama since his 2004 Senate campaign. During that contest, Noland produced a poster styled like a bill from a 1960s prizefight, touting the match up between Obama the "Crown Prince" and Alan Keyes the "Hired Gun." While recovering from a bicycle accident in the summer of 2006, Noland began toying with the idea of creating a poster campaign.

"The Dream" was well-received. Noland sold prints and plowed the money into printing more. The poster became so successful that he created other Obama images. His website, gotellmama.org, displays more than a dozen of them, with designs ranging from "Speaking to U.S.," which depicts a silhouette of Obama lecturing a television camera shaped like the lower 48 states, to "Obamahood," with its brown and green motif, where a kindly Barack is handing a sack labeled "Health Care," Robin Hood style, to the peasantry.

To get a sense of Noland's politics, you need only look at the details. In one print, a crowd of Obama supporters is waving tiny placards, some of which read "Surge of Diplomacy" and "Peace Is Patriotic." Another poster, titled "No! From the Go," bears the slogan "U.S. out of Iraq."

Noland's designs attracted a huge amount of attention in the art community, and even some interest from the Obama campaign. At first, campaign officials asked him to donate his images, according to the *New York Post*. He declined. But the campaign finally did purchase a poster, which was used as part of the official promotion for a September 2007 rally in New York City.

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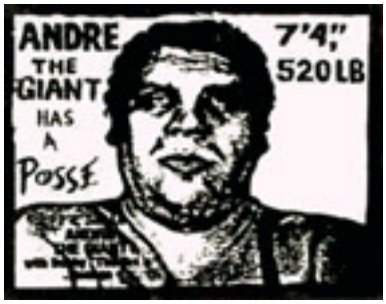
Shepard Fairey was the next to step forward. He is best known for his early 1990s underground "Andre the Giant has a posse" campaign, a cultural phenomenon designed around a small, easily reproducible likeness of the wrestler. Fairey distributed thousands of stickers and posters bearing the image, which eventually took on a life of its own, turning up in cities and towns across the globe—the image itself becoming part of the popular culture. Fairey specializes in this sort of epiphenomenon, which he calls "propaganda engineering." As his website proudly proclaims, he's been "manufacturing quality dissent since 1989."

Fairey is not new to politics. As he told Creativity-Online.com, "I've been paying attention to politics since the mid-'90s." In 2000, he created an anti-Bush poster. In 2004, even though he "wasn't really that impressed" with John Kerry, he mounted what he calls a "pretty aggressive anti-Bush poster campaign" called "Be the Revolution" in support of Kerry. It wasn't until Obama appeared on the scene that Fairey really fell for a candidate. He would later explain that he admired Obama's "radical cachet." "I have made art opposing the Iraq war for several years, and making art of Obama, who opposed the war from the start, is like making art for peace."



Shepard Fairey, who became known in the '90s for his 'Andre the Giant has a Posse' campaign has been inspired by Obama's 'radical cachet.' The result: 'PROGRESS' and 'HOPE' (opposite).

In January, he unveiled two posters in support of Obama. Done in blood red and grays, the prints depicted a large, iconic Obama, head thoughtfully cocked. One version of the poster proclaims "HOPE," the other, "PROGRESS." As *Los Angeles Times* columnist Meghan Daum noted, the Fairey motif was something like "Bolshevik constructivism meets skate-punk graffiti art," all of which suggests that the subject might be "a Third World dictator." But the *American Thinker*'s Peggy Shapiro grasped the poster's more proximate ancestor: Fairey was using "the graphic style of totalitarian Soviet propaganda . . . [recalling] the idealized portraits and personality cult of the 'Beloved Leader' such as Stalin and Lenin."

Fairey's posters have become huge hits—you often see them at Obama rallies adorning either T-shirts or signs and plastering urban places such as bus kiosks. (And instant collectors' items, too: Numbered prints from the original run fetch hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of dollars.) Here, too, the campaign took notice. In February, Obama wrote to Fairey thanking him. "I'm privileged to be a part of your artwork," Obama said. The campaign also asked Fairey to design another print for them, featuring the word "Change" and a different angle of Obama's face. He obliged. The print sold out on the official Obama website.

'Tomorrow is an Historic Day in U.S. History, now is your time to make change. VOTE! (or else you're just part of the problem—use your liberties! make it happen).' Painting by Dan Buller for Heavyweight Productions (HVW8.com).

Artists keep flocking to the Obama campaign, designing posters, sometimes selling them, and often giving them away for free. Some of the work is more traditional, such as New Jersey designer Rob Kelly's poster showing a cartoonish Obama with stars and a "Barack Obama for President '08" tag. Some is self-consciously iconic, such as Louisville designer Tom Fox's aping of Andy Warhol. Some came from big design firms: A Brooklyn company called Hyperakt, which has done work for Colgate, Ford, and the NHL, distributes free posters it created for the candidate. And some efforts remain anonymous, like the stark black-and-white Obama bills that covered downtown Seattle last fall.

Designer Jean Aw, trying to explain the attraction, told the *Huffington Post* that "By placing such an emphasis on building a visually appealing brand, Obama is validating the importance of design in communication. This in turn builds support from the design community, who might feel that a design-conscious candidate best represents their personal beliefs."

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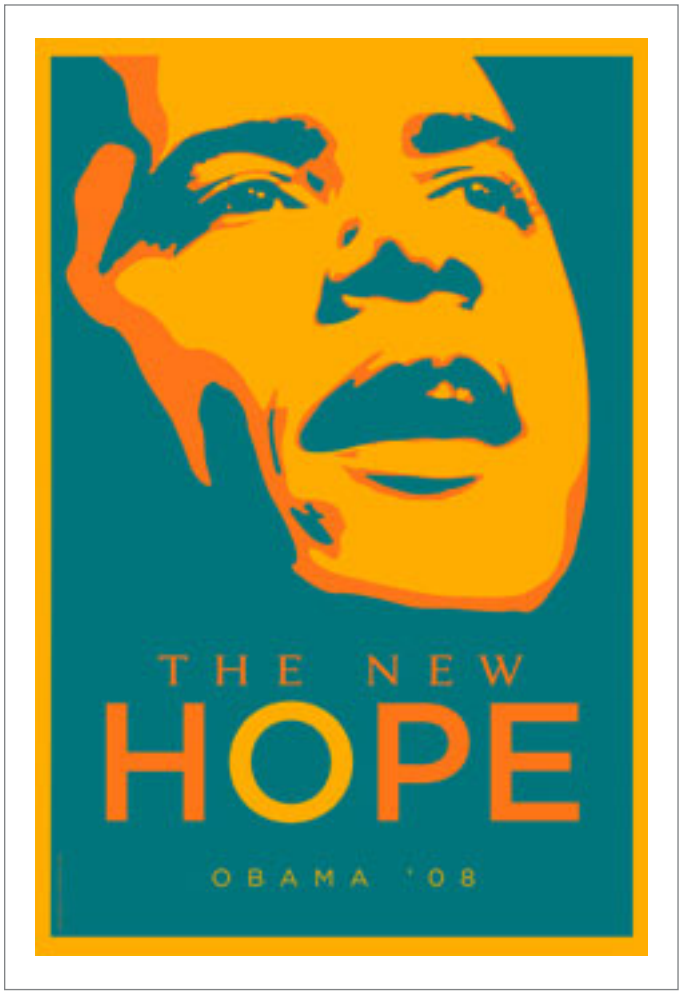

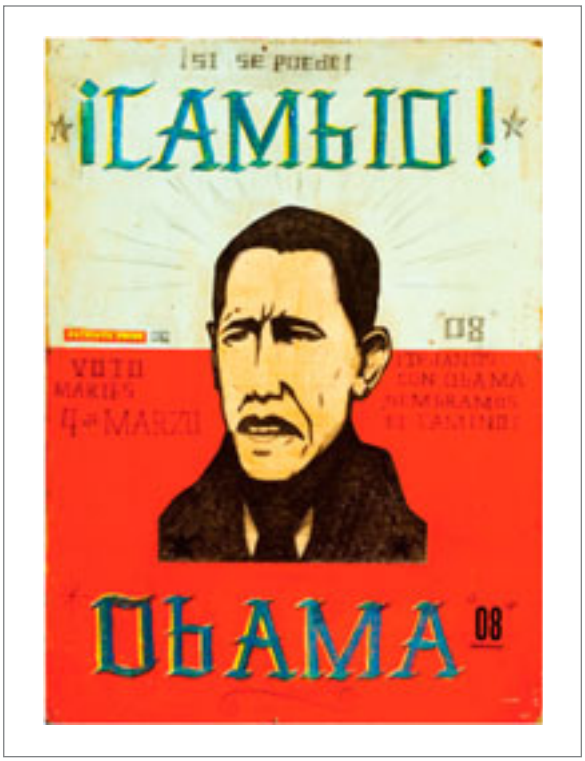

'Obama—The New Hope—Orange' from Hyperakt, a 'branding and interactive design studio' based in Brooklyn. A Spanish-language poster, 'Change!,' designed for the Texas primary by the Date Farmers.

Of course it is equally possible that artists are responding instead to an ideological kinship with Obama. The Upper Playground is an artist collective in San Francisco, which the *San Francisco Chronicle* helpfully describes as a "multiplatform international lifestyle brand encompassing artist-centered clothing and housewares." In February they endorsed Obama, writing, "For too long we have been plagued by mediocrity and incompetence at the Executive level. As an international company, we feel that it is time to support a candidate that truly embodies the American spirit in both his campaign and his ideologies. We believe that Barack Obama is that candidate."

To support their candidate, Upper Playground has worked with a number of artists (with handles such as "Morning Breath" and "Munk One") to create and sell posters about "the man we have all come to love." Some of the designs have the funky feel of '70s agitprop; some are even more socialist than the Fairey works. In advance of the Texas primary, Upper Playground teamed with an artistic duo called the Date Farmers to create a Spanish language print that portrayed Obama as a cross between an immigrant labor activist and South American dictator. Another collective, known as HVW8, created a work depicting Obama looking eerily like Chairman Mao.

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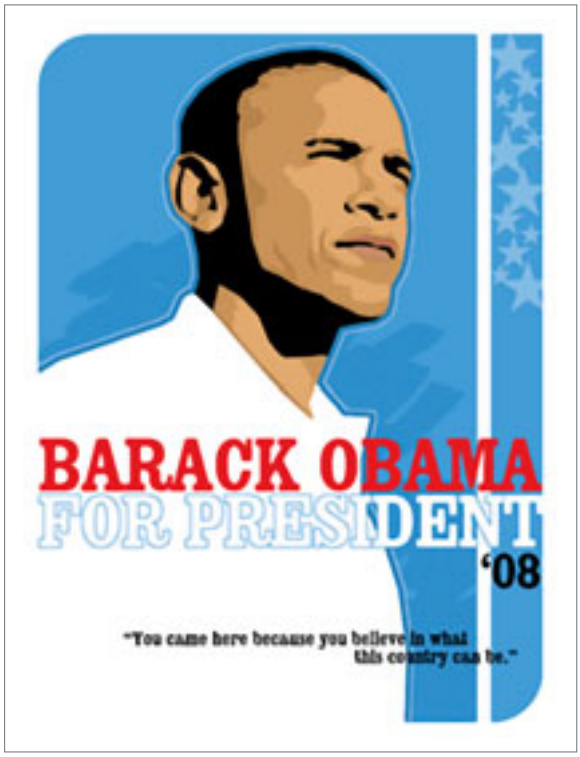

New Jersey designer Rob Kelly's traditional take (above); an anonymous poster that blanketed Seattle last fall (right); 'Hope,' by MUNK ONE, a.k.a. Jose A. Mercado, a Los Angeles-based illustrator.

It's unclear how much contact the campaign has had with all these artists. Probably not much. An Obama volunteer named Yosi Sergant (an L.A. publicist who is listed as a "California Media Adviser" for the campaign) claims to have been nominally involved in the Fairey posters, telling *PaperMag.com*, "I ran into Shep at a party and he said 'I love Obama. I said, 'Make a poster,' and he said, 'You think that's cool?' And I said, 'GO FOR IT.'"

The *New York Post* reports that the Obama campaign's external online director, Scott Goodstein, emailed Ray Noland, telling him that "we think what you're doing expresses the true emotion of the campaign." The *Post* also reports that a mural made by graffiti artist "Kofie'One" is now in L.A.'s Generation Obama headquarters.

But whatever small confidences the campaign has doled out, for most of the radical/progressive artists their Obama ministry is a labor of love. The artists believe that Obama really does represent something new in American politics. For the Bolshevik-constructivist, skate-punk crowd, he is the one they've been waiting for. ♦

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A Theme for McCain's Pudding

Here's how to tie together the campaign's assortment of ideas: a reform agenda for the 21st century.

By Yuval Levin

In recent weeks, while the penultimate chapter of the Democratic nomination race has monopolized our attention, John McCain has engaged in a series of auditions of general election themes for his campaign. In early April, he set out on a "Service to America Tour," highlighting key points of his biography. Two weeks later, he launched his "Time for Action Tour," which focused on some of the country's most economically depressed regions, and which should by no means be confused with the "Call to Action Tour" that followed and focused on McCain's health care plans. Then last week in Ohio, McCain outlined key elements of his agenda in a speech organized around a description of America in 2013—after his first term. Speaking of the future in the past tense, he sought to describe himself as an ambitious doer.

All of these allowed McCain to raise important issues and to offer some interesting ideas. The health care tour, in particular, yielded a speech (delivered in Tampa, Florida, on April 29) that is to date the best articulation of the conservative vision of health care from a Republican politician. What has not emerged is a coherent campaign narrative: a theme that unites McCain's proposals, his persona, his assessment of the state of the nation today, and the essence of what he plans to offer the voter in November. Indeed, this absence of an organizing principle was painfully evident in his "America in 2013" speech, which was the very model of a themeless pudding.

The titles and the presentation of these assorted events suggest the McCain campaign is looking to ground its messages in duty, honor, and ability, presenting the candidate as a man who has always been ready to step up and act when his country needed him. This was roughly the approach of the Dole campaign in 1996 and (in a rather different way) of the Kerry campaign in 2004, and in both cases it failed to capture the imagination of the electorate. Campaigns need to sell their candidate, to be sure, but successful campaigns usually do so by articulating a candidate's vision of the present moment and the future, and not just his willingness to answer a call. The McCain campaign is currently organized around the candidate's character and persona, and the question is to what governing philosophy McCain's "honor politics" points.

It is of course fairly late in the game to be engaged in basic message development, but McCain's peculiar path to victory in the primaries did not force him to do so earlier. He won, after all, without a base, without much of a strategy, and without an organized campaign apparatus. His various rivals eliminated one another (or, in the case of Giuliani and Thompson, eliminated themselves), and McCain was the man left standing in the end. His defining issue was the war in Iraq, which seems increasingly unlikely to be the issue that defines the general election. The McCain team is therefore in the unusual position of having won the primaries without a clear unifying theme for its candidate's message. The challenge is not to invent a campaign theme from scratch, but to discern and articulate the organizing principle of the candidate's outlook on politics.

McCain himself long ago offered the core of the answer. In announcing his first run for the presidency, in September 1999, McCain declared that if elected he would work to "reform our public institutions to meet the demands of a new day." So far he has not made the vocabulary of reform a key to his second run for the White House. But a comprehensive reform agenda, which framed America's challenge in terms of revitalizing and reimagining its core

Yuval Levin is the Hertog fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center and senior editor at the New Atlantis *magazine.*

JUN PARK

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public institutions, would be a natural fit for McCain, and for the challenges of the day. It would provide him with the overarching theme for the assorted elements of his approach to public policy.

Change and Reform

A successful McCain campaign would begin with noting what is wrong with the Democrats' main theme: change. In an election year marked by a vague but pervasive sense of anxiety among voters, there is something ironic about the Democratic mantra. Change, after all, is exactly what Americans have been experiencing over the last several decades: changes in the American and the global economy; changes in social and family structure; changes and advances in the technologies of medicine, communication, transportation, and information processing; changes in just about every facet of our lives. Many have been welcome, but all have brought with them unease, especially as they have outpaced the ability of our large public institutions to adapt. Lurking beneath the individual concerns and anxieties that voters express to pollsters is a broad crisis of confidence, grounded in apprehension about the escalating failures of these institutions, from the intelligence community and giant Wall Street banks, to entitlement programs, the immigration system, and beyond.

McCain has put forward a plan for reforming health care, which begins gently to separate insurance from employment and to introduce market incentives that will contain costs.

Many of our public institutions arose to meet the demands of the 20th century. The growth of complex financial markets brought about the Federal Reserve and an evolving regime of financial regulation. The emergence of powerful new technologies brought about agencies, like the Food and Drug Administration and the Federal Aviation Administration, to ensure their safe use. The expenses of longer and healthier lives led to entitlement programs like Social Security and Medicare and to a complicated system of employer-based health insurance. The demands of two world wars and a long cold war brought about an integrated American military and a slew of intelligence agencies. And the challenges of managing and regulating all of this led to vast new institutions of governance: from the career federal bureaucracy and the absurdly complex tax code to the modern federal budget process.

These institutions have always had critics, but in recent years the old debates have begun to seem outdated as the circumstances from which they emerged have changed dramatically and the institutions begun to show signs of serious decay. Grave institutional failures have been behind some of the prominent problems of the Bush years. The systemic sclerosis of the intelligence community led American leaders to underestimate al Qaeda's ambitions and to overestimate Iraq's weapons programs. A disorganized domestic response apparatus revealed itself after September 11 and again in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. An overly rigid military (particularly the Army) designed for the Cold War found it difficult to adapt after early setbacks in Iraq and has even resisted a new and winning strategy more recently.

A health care financing system built for the mid-20th-century American economy has been showing strain for decades—just about everyone now agrees it needs a serious redesign. Old-age entitlements designed for a very different population are threatening to go bankrupt and take the federal government right with them. A legal immigration system enacted four decades ago is far out of touch with contemporary needs, while illegal immigration proceeds at a staggering pace.

Regulatory institutions have not fared better, and in just the past several months, we have seen embarrassing breakdowns at the FAA, signs of severe overextension at the FDA, failures of basic oversight in the nation's financial regulatory system, and new causes to worry about the readiness of the Federal Reserve to contend with unexpected events. Similar signs of trouble are everywhere. Individually, each of these may be dismissed as a modest problem, of the sort that is always popping up somewhere.

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But seen together, as they are arriving together, these signs point to a decay that may be *the* governing problem of the moment.

Bipartisan Blindness

The left and the right have both largely failed to notice this emerging pattern. For the left, it has been easy these eight years to blame every failure of governance on a failure of execution and to assume that the man in charge of the executive branch is the key to all our troubles. To the extent that they now propose institutional reform—and it is a surprisingly limited extent—leading Democrats have in mind giving government more power and more responsibility: in health care, over the financial markets, in the housing sector. But that is less a response to the emerging decay of our public institutions than an expression of the left's generic approach to great governing problems.

Senators Obama and Clinton, moreover, have almost nothing to say about many of the most prominent institutional crises we face, including immigration, the structure of the military and the intelligence community, and (perhaps most amazingly) entitlements and the looming crisis of our welfare state institutions. Indeed, both have offered health care plans that would import into the private health care market the logic of a Medicare system now facing an $86 trillion unfunded liability.

Republicans, meanwhile, having never been quite at home with the original purposes and ends of some of these institutions, aren't thinking constructively about reforming them (though there are a few exceptions, most notably Newt Gingrich). There has, of course, been debate about the structure of the military and immigration, and Republicans are increasingly thinking creatively about health care as well. But the conservative response to the Bush administration's Medicare prescription drug plan, for instance—a plan that for the first time introduced market incentives into Medicare and quickly proved the power of incentives to reduce costs and improve quality—shows that the right is still fighting the last war and failing to recognize an opportunity to roll back the most egregious elements of the welfare state, by planting conservative principles deep in enemy territory. Conservatives have a chance to fundamentally alter some of the assumptions behind our large public agencies of regulation, governance, and welfare.

Conservative Reform

The right is well suited to the task of such reform. The overarching lesson of our failing institutions is not that government has failed to reach far enough into American society, but that life in the 21st century is more complex and less predictable than our 20th-century institutions can readily fathom. The answer is not to expand government so it can rescue people from themselves—which is the underlying premise behind just about every plank of Hillary Clinton's and Barack Obama's platforms—but to make the institutions dynamic and flexible enough to advance the causes of economic growth, cultural vitality, and national security.

"A disposition to preserve and an ability to improve" was Edmund Burke's definition of the statesman two centuries ago, and it remains the hallmark of conservatism. While American conservatives have sometimes liked to think of themselves as revolutionaries (or radical counter-revolutionaries), the most significant accomplishments of the conservative movement have actually been targeted reforms that turned existing institutions to conservative ends. The Reagan "revolution" gave us a tax code better suited to entrepreneurship and growth. The Gingrich "revolution" gave us a welfare system with incentives geared toward encouraging independence and initiative. Conservative reform of urban law enforcement, and early efforts at reform of local education (through school choice), have improved what we have, rather than rejecting it. Reform, not revolution, is the conservative path to supporting strong families and free markets.

A reform agenda would be especially well suited to John McCain, as he himself seemed to see in 1999. McCain's conservatism is not fundamentally ideological. He is not especially interested in political "issues" or in abstract ideas about individual rights or the role of government. Rather, he is moved by large challenges and great exertions, and by the imperative of meeting America's commitments. He is a conservative because he believes the right has a more

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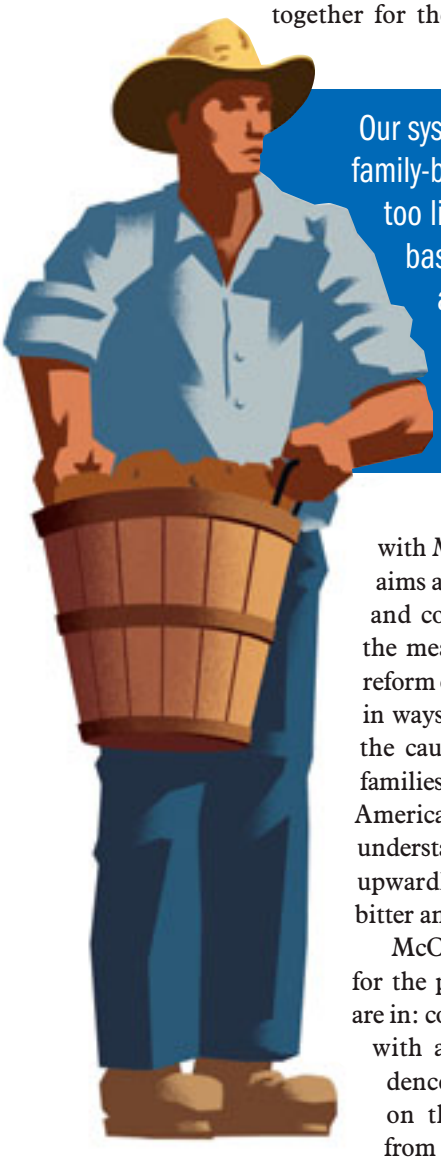
responsible attitude toward meeting these commitments, and is more likely to keep Americans (as individuals and as a nation) strong enough to do great things.

This makes for an awkward marriage between McCain and the conservative movement, but it is a coupling with more opportunities for joint efforts than the two sides realize. Rather than pretend McCain is a traditional movement conservative or that conservatism is a nonideological honor code, the two should seize an opportunity to work together for their rather different ends, with McCain giving voice to the aims and the urgency of reforms, and conservatives offering him the means. They should seek to reform our governing institutions in ways that would turn them to the cause of America's working families (which are the source of America's strengths), and should understand that cause in terms of upwardly mobile aspiration, not bitter and angry desperation.



Our system is too heavy on family-based immigration and too light on sensible labor-based immigration. It is almost entirely lacking in any formal elements of assimilation and integration.

McCain should paint a picture for the public of the moment we are in: confronted on the one hand with a justified crisis of confidence in our institutions and on the other with proposals from the Democrats driven by a set of liberal ideological commitments that would exacerbate the problem by carelessly expanding government. The cure for what ails us is not change that is simply more of the same—more bureaucracy, a further takeover of the private and domestic spheres that in the name of offering relief steals away more and more of our independence and initiative. The cure, rather, is to plant in the architecture of our largest public institutions the conservative commitments to individual freedom and initiative, to the centrality of parenthood and the family, and to the cause of American strength in the world.

A Reform Agenda

A McCain reform agenda would begin with an effort to help give American families more say over the institutions they rely on most directly.

America's health care system is a product of 20th-century labor policies, and it is struggling to keep up with 21st-century medicine. It puts too many incentives in the wrong places and creates needless uncertainties and tensions. The care is not itself a problem: It is for the most part advanced, high quality medicine, and those with access to it are very happy with it. The problem is that access to insurance coverage is a function of a tax policy grounded in World War II-era employment laws. Many Americans in our modern economy no longer fit the model—not because they are oppressed or put upon, but because they are pursuing prosperity in different ways. Small business employees, the self-employed, freelancers, and those who change jobs frequently find themselves at constant risk of losing health coverage.

The answer is not a program of government subsidies that slowly drives consumers into public insurance—which is what Senators Clinton and Obama propose—and which would create an even less responsive system than the one we now have. (This would replace a slowly decaying 20th-century model with an essentially bankrupt 20th-century model.) The answer is, rather, to treat individuals as individuals, create incentives for cost containment in the private sector, and help the uninsured find private coverage.

To his credit, McCain has already put forward a plan along these lines, which begins gently to separate insurance from employment and to introduce market incentives to contain costs—but he needs to make a concerted effort to explain it and show why it is preferable to the Democrats' approach. The failure of American health coverage is the preeminent domestic concern in this election year, and conservative health care reform is the key to McCain's reform agenda.

Tort reform is another natural issue for McCain, as a companion cause to his health care reform. The existing medical liability regime pits trial lawyers—an unpopular Democratic interest group—against doctors and nurses, and it increases the cost of health care for all. Conservatives have long advocated some modest but meaningful reforms of medical liability, and McCain would be wise to draw on those ideas and make the issue a prominent cause in the coming months.

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Democratic politicians have chosen to deny the looming crisis in Social Security and to blithely ignore the even larger and more complicated disaster facing Medicare. McCain has argued for comprehensive Social Security reform in the past and should do so again with renewed vigor. Here again, Republicans have an answer at the ready: a plan for personal accounts for future recipients that leaves those age 55 and over untouched. It is a vital reform in desperate need of a champion to make its case.

Medicare, unfortunately, is a much bigger problem. But the design of the prescription drug benefit passed in 2003 offers a model. As James Capretta has argued, Medicare should be gradually transformed from an open-ended entitlement into a defined-contribution program, which provides individuals with a preset amount (based on average insurance costs in their area) toward the purchase of private or public insurance. Individuals would choose what specific plan to purchase, so plans would compete for their business. Such an approach would not only begin to reverse Medicare's disastrous fiscal course, it would also help contain costs in the larger health care sector (since Medicare's open-ended reimbursement is responsible for a significant portion of health care cost inflation). No politician has had the courage to address Medicare's fiscal troubles. McCain could do so as part of a broader appeal for reform and insist that to ignore the problem is a disgraceful dereliction of responsibility to the future.

McCain also can become a more forceful booster for school choice. The failure of many urban schools, and the underperformance in many rural and suburban schools, is a function of a deeply sclerotic and counterproductive bureaucracy, working in tandem with a powerful union (another Democratic constituency) that resists any hint at reform. Directing his attention to urban schools that underprivilege students who are seriously underprivileged to begin with, McCain should make a case for targeted choice programs, which have worked in a few fortunate cities in the past decade. He can make it clear to middle-class parents that their children's schools need not change if they are working, but that other children desperately need to be given a chance to escape from failing schools.

Tax reform is also a way of supporting lower- and middle-class families while encouraging economic growth. McCain should seek not only to remove unneeded burdens on businesses—as he has already declared his desire to do—but also (and especially) to remove unfair burdens on parents. A major expansion of the child tax credit, applied against payroll as well as income taxes—as proposed by Ramesh Ponnuru and Robert Stein—would be the ideal centerpiece of a McCain tax reform. McCain has made gestures in this direction, but should make this a prominent proposal. It would clearly signal that his agenda is aimed at middle- and lower-class families. And McCain's entire reform platform should be directed to the stresses and concerns of these families.

The housing and credit crisis afflicting the American economy also provides an opportunity to take a fresh look at key elements of the government's role in regulating credit markets and corporate governance. McCain is well suited to take on Wall Street's excesses without attacking its core strengths. The key is not more regulation, but smarter and leaner regulation, which removes unnecessary burdens from businesses but protects America's large new investor class—which did not exist when many of our regulatory institutions were born. It is also time to consider fundamental reforms of the federal reserve system.

Fixing Government

As he addresses the institutions that touch the lives of American families, McCain should propose a reform of the federal government itself. He might begin with comprehensive budget reform, promising to work with Congress to redesign the annual federal budget process, with its 11 separate fiefdoms, its inability to produce an orderly budget on time, and its endless opportunities for mischief, waste, and fraud.

McCain could also call for a thorough reappraisal of federal regulatory agencies, beginning with the Food and Drug Administration. The FDA is over a century old and has not been able to keep up with dramatic changes in both technology and the world economy, particularly the globalization of the supply chains for food and medicine. The contamination of pet food resulting from improper

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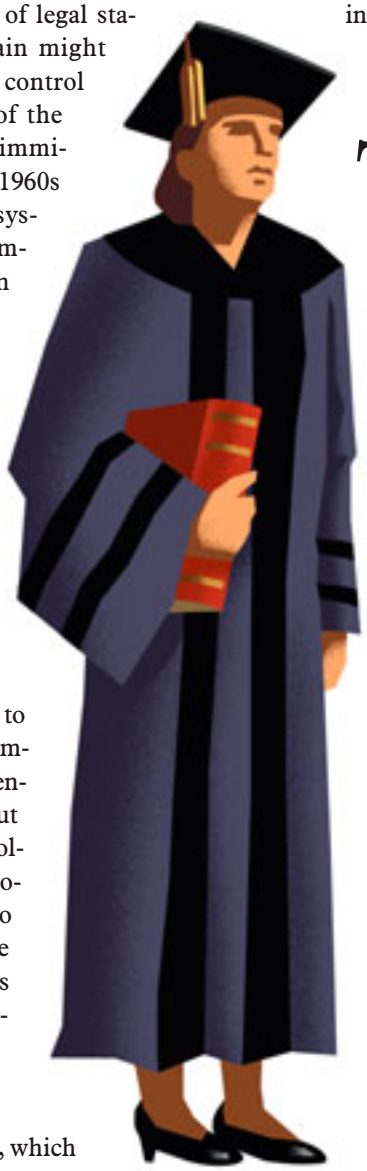
practices by a Chinese supplier last year was a loud and clear warning: A similar (and far more terrifying) disaster in the human food supply is easily imaginable under today's regulatory regime. The FDA needs more than new resources; it needs a top-down redesign. Other safety and regulatory agencies, like the FAA, have also shown serious strain in the last few years and require a rethinking.

The failure of America's immigration system, meanwhile, is a problem McCain knows all too well. Rather than raise again the prospect of legal status for illegal aliens, however, McCain might focus on two more urgent priorities: control of the southern border and reform of the *legal* immigration system. America's immigration laws were written in the mid-1960s and only barely revised since. The system they created is too heavy on family-based immigration and too light on sensible labor-based immigration. It is also almost entirely lacking in any formal elements of assimilation and integration. It needs to be thoroughly redesigned to combine secure borders with open arms and economic benefit with common sense.

Perhaps most important, McCain should propose a comprehensive national security reform agenda. He is well-versed in the need to restructure American diplomacy and to reform the military, the intelligence community, and our homeland security agencies. He has already begun to talk about some reforms of America's foreign policy apparatus (particularly public diplomacy), and even about some reforms to global institutions, seeking to replace the mid-20th-century United Nations with a 21st-century league of democracies. The last few years have offered no shortage of lessons for reforming the organization of the Armed Forces and revisiting the joint command structure, which is showing real strain. The intelligence community, meanwhile, is showing not strain but signs of systemic failure. The Bush administration began some efforts at reform through the creation of a director of national intelligence, but vigorous work is sorely needed. In pursuing both military and intelligence reform, moreover, McCain has a particularly rich storehouse of conservative reform ideas to call upon.



There is also a powerful cautionary lesson to draw on. The Department of Homeland Security is the first prominent example we have of a major 21st-century reform, and it is mostly a negative example. It demonstrates that reform must consist of more than moving existing boxes around on an organizational chart and creating vast new structures to house largely unreformed old institutions. Institutional reform is not only about efficiency; it must also be directed to a reappraisal of ends and a careful honing of means.

A Campaign for Reform

These are, to be sure, mere chapter headings for a campaign agenda. But in many of these areas the McCain campaign has already offered proposals, which it now could tie together under a common narrative. That narrative ought to revolve around the challenges that call for reform, and the need for reforms that build on America's strengths, rather than exacerbating its troubles. Such an approach would suit McCain. He could show his grasp of the challenges we face and his confidence in America's future. He could drive home the point that what we need is not more government but a government better suited to the times and to the concerns of the American family.

Obviously such an immense reform agenda could not be accomplished by any single president, and particularly not in the exceedingly difficult political circumstances McCain would likely face if he won in November. But by advancing an ambitious agenda—one that if anything is too heavy on specifics—McCain could provide a sensible and coherent explanation for the generalized anxiety of the American public today and a road map toward addressing it head on.

McCain would also be providing conservatives with a new way of thinking about the challenges they confront as a governing party rather than a counterrevolutionary one and a new vocabulary for making the case for limited-but-effective government, for freedom and individual responsibility, and for American values. Precisely such reforms have been among the greatest gifts the conservative movement has given America. A renewed program of energetic conservative reform would bear similar benefits in years to come. ♦

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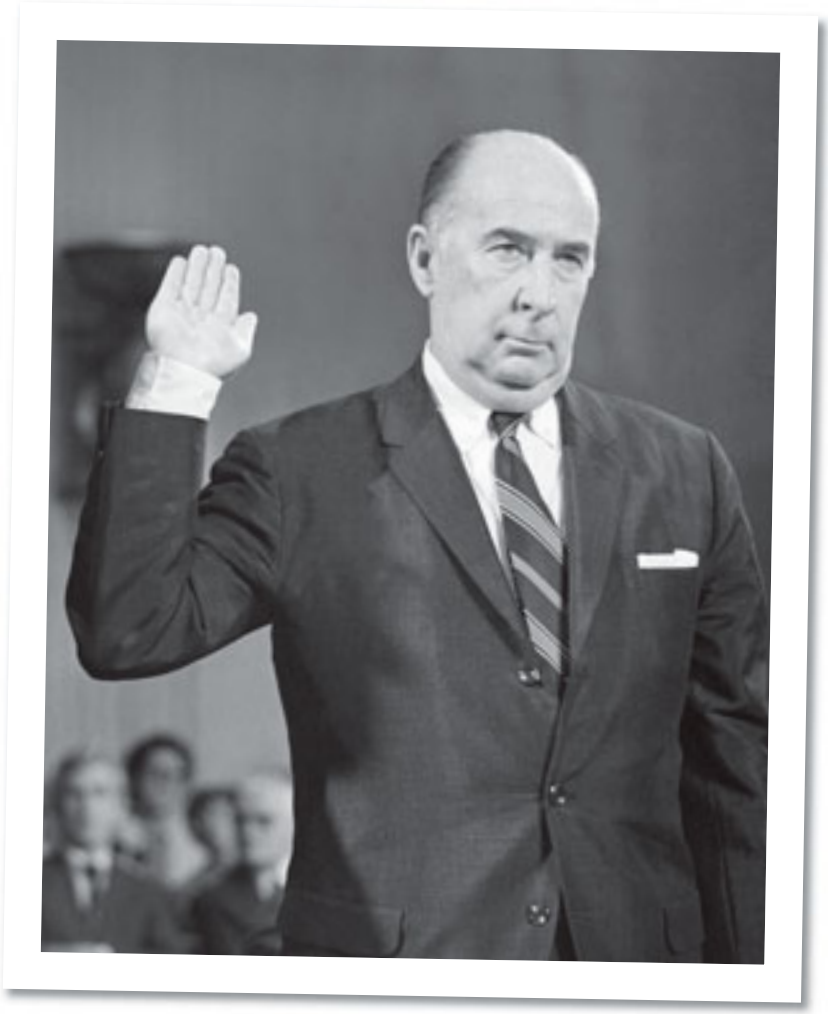
Big Bad John

Nixon's attorney general deserves his reputation

BY ROBERT D. NOVAK



John Mitchell takes the oath, 1971

BETTMANN / CORBIS

James Rosen, an accomplished television correspondent now with Fox News, is familiar with his trade's practice of finishing stories with a kicker that surprises the viewer by presenting something different. So, to conclude the first biography of John Mitchell, Rosen's last two paragraphs on pages 498-99 contain a shocker about the Nixon campaign manager and attorney general who went to prison in the Watergate scandal.

The Strong Man
John Mitchell and the Secrets of Watergate
by James Rosen
Doubleday, 640 pp., $35

Rosen concludes by relating what Mitchell—"disgraced, disbarred, an ex-convict fresh out prison"—in 1979 told his Justice Department press secretary Jack Landau, who asked what Mitchell would have done differently in his lifetime if he could. Mitchell told Landau a story of how, in 1960, long before Mitchell connected with Richard Nixon, he was paid an unscheduled visit at his Manhattan law offices by Robert F. Kennedy. Mitchell kept him waiting, and "Kennedy didn't like that."

As Rosen relates the story:

> Kennedy said he understood Mitchell was an important man with contacts in nearly all 50 states. How did he feel about helping to run his brother John's presidential campaign? Mitchell demurred. Kennedy was undeterred. He started waving around documents, suggesting it would be in Mitchell's interests—and those of his clients—if he reconsidered. With that Mitchell threw the younger man out of his office.

Then Mitchell said, "If I had it all over to do, I'd run Jack Kennedy's campaign."

After being told repeatedly in *The Strong Man* of Mitchell's loyalty to Richard Nixon even at the cost of prison ("he asked Watergate prosecutors to cease their pursuit of the president in exchange for his own guilty plea"), the reader is unprepared for this unfulfilled Kennedy yearning.

The problem is that I don't believe the incident ever happened. I knew Bobby Kennedy well enough to feel it would be totally out of character to ask a total stranger to help "run" his brother's campaign, or to emotionally explode in front of that stranger. An anecdote as juicy as Bobby Kennedy getting thrown out of John Mitchell's office surely would have surfaced in gossipy Washington during the past 48 years. I do believe Landau told Rosen the story in an interview for this book, and I rely on Landau's reputation for integrity as a career

Robert D. Novak, syndicated columnist and Fox News analyst, is the author, most recently, of The Prince of Darkness: 50 Years Reporting in Washington.

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journalist to be sure he accurately reported what his former boss told him.

But I think Mitchell made it up. The principal new insight I drew from *The Strong Man* was that John Mitchell was a serial liar who had trouble knowing what was true. The Nixon administration was filled with world-class liars, including the president himself, and Mitchell was not the worst of them. Rosen makes a convincing case that perjured testimony, especially from White House aides John Dean and Jeb Magruder, formed the basis of the case that made Mitchell "the highest-ranking government official ever to serve [prison] time." But this book does not evade the reality that Mitchell also lied repeatedly—lied under oath, lied in interviews, and lied in private conversation.

Rosen conceals nothing. Mitchell's account of alleged boyhood misadventures, tossing schoolbooks in the fire when his school caught on fire, and later burning down his family's home with Fourth of July sparklers, was pure fiction. In extolling Nixon's virtues during a 1971 interview with the conservative journalist Frank van der Linden, Mitchell was "baldly propounding things he knew to be untrue." He "never fully disclosed what he knew—what the declassified tapes *showed* he knew" about "complicity" by Adm. Thomas Moorer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, in the Pentagon brass's "espionage" against President Nixon. Mitchell was trying to avoid a scandalous court martial of the admiral; but as late as 1982 Mitchell told a "disbelieving" Seymour Hersh that Moorer was "totally uninvolved and blameless." It was "a blatant lie" when he denied talking to Nixon about the ITT Corporation, lying about his role in the ITT scandal because he "never imagined evidence would surface."

Therein lies a major difficulty for this book. Rosen harbors admiration for a public figure "notorious for his inscrutability" and suggests Mitchell was the victim of "ritual sacrifice" demanded by "the times" and the *New York Times*. Yet, Rosen is too honest a reporter to conceal the defects of his subject in research that includes the author's interviews dating back to the 1990s.

Americans know more about the Nixon regime than they do past administrations (or will future administrations) thanks to Nixon's secret taping and White House chief of staff H.R. Haldeman's secret diary. Rosen goes further by uncovering previously unpublished notes taken by Haldeman, augmented by his own interviews. If there were any vestigial doubt that Nixon led a band of blackguards, this book removes it.

But what was Mitchell's role? He did not share Nixon the politician's "longing for universal approval," Rosen writes, and "dutifully . . . played his assigned role as the disciplinarian, imposer of law and order against radical chic, the dour authoritarian face of Nixon's counterrevolution against hippies, pushers and protesters." In return, Nixon is described as "scheming to make [Mitchell] take the rap for a crime—Watergate—in which Mitchell bore no responsibility."

With President Nixon, 1970

BETTMANN / CORBIS

However, Rosen does not take his subject off the hook. While Mitchell was "framed, casualty of a wicked alliance between conspirators eager to tell lies and prosecutors eager to tell them," Rosen acknowledges "that Mitchell played a role is indisputable."

The overriding question is: What happened when G. Gordon Liddy presented the Gemstone plan to break the law in the interest of confounding the Democrats, without specifically including the Watergate burglary? Rosen's judgment: "Mitchell never ordered the Watergate operation, never even heard a proposal targeting that site, but he'd sat at the pinnacle of American law enforcement and twice listened to Gordon Liddy propose similar crimes and never ordered Liddy arrested or fired." His "paramount concern," Rosen writes, was that "the three meetings at which the Gemstone plan was presented to him *should never be disclosed*" because that would endanger Nixon's chances for a second term.

Mitchell later testified: "I had no

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obligation to come down and inform the grand jury voluntarily."

That defiance reflects Mitchell's constricted view that being attorney general made him primarily the president's lawyer, assigned to assure Nixon's reelection in 1972. Rosen rationalizes this mindset by contending that Mitchell "never wielded power in arrogant fashion," using it "to advance the greater good, which he happened to see as indistinguishable from the fortunes of Richard Nixon." Mitchell's "achievements at Justice were momentous," and he stepped in "when he saw Nixon's darker impulses threatening the nation." Rosen contends that "working behind the scenes, Mitchell reinforced the most progressive racial policy he could without damaging the reelection fortunes of his 'client.'"

But, in truth, that policy was never very progressive, and Rosen's reporting often puts Mitchell on the dark side. When the attorney general wanted to forcibly remove antiwar veterans from the Mall after they refused to obey a court injunction, Nixon intervened by citing the political disaster of President Herbert Hoover sending in the Army against the Bonus Marchers in 1932. Rosen reveals "a furious row" between Nixon and Mitchell, with the president prevailing.

Because Rosen is regarded as a Watergate revisionist, this book was awaited with anticipation for the "secrets of Watergate" promised in the subtitle. The book's prologue teases with provocative questions: "What role did CIA and the intelligence community at large play in Watergate?" And "Were Nixon and his men forced to pay a price for their embrace of détente with the Soviet Union and rapprochement with Red China?" Rosen does not answer those questions, or even pose them again over the rest of *The Strong Man*, except to say that Mitchell went to his grave saying, "The CIA was behind the whole thing."

If the author wanted to rehabilitate Mitchell's reputation, as he suggests he does, he has failed. In reporting and writing about Mitchell for many years, I saw him as a nasty piece of work. I still do after reading *The Strong Man*, despite Rosen's depiction of Mitchell's warmer side, particularly his exemplary conduct in prison helping fellow convicts.

On balance, Rosen's unfailingly honest reportage reveals a man of bad character. Hard pressed for funds as a disbarred ex-convict, Mitchell signed a $150,000 (big money 35 years ago) contract with Simon & Schuster for his memoirs. It was a swindle, because Mitchell (in the words of his lawyer, William Hundley) "wouldn't write about Watergate, and he wouldn't write about [his wife] Martha." That meant Mitchell never delivered a page to the publisher, who went to court for a partial settlement.

Even more disturbing is the account of his relationship with Martha Mitchell, described by Rosen as "a sick, mean, and ignorant woman, roiling with vanity and insecurity, demeaning to people who she considered beneath her, and prone . . . to violent bursts of alcoholism." The author writes that her "initial attraction" to Mitchell in what started as "an extramarital affair" could be found in "adultery's usual draws: sex, excitement, illicit adventure." But after their marriage had collapsed, Mitchell explained why his eight-year prison sentence was not so severe: "They could have sentenced me to spend the rest of my life with Martha."

Martha and John Mitchell, 1971

BETTMANN / CORBIS

That heartless remark about a troubled woman whom he had treated with patience was the tough-guy façade that put Richard Nixon, Rosen writes, "in awe of Mitchell." When Mitchell said that "this country is going so far right you are not even going to recognize it," and advised Nixon not to address black publishers because "you can buy these monkeys anyway," he was feeding Nixon's worst prejudices—not saving the president from his baser instincts, as *The Strong Man* implies.

James Rosen tries to make the point that John Mitchell "somehow" stood "fundamentally apart from the criminality of the Nixon administration," but he does not really make that case, even while producing an engrossing account of a flawed regime whose secrets do not fail to shock us almost four decades later. ♦

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Assassins' Trilogy

Life and death in the Islamic Republic of America.

BY JOEL SCHWARTZ

With the publication of *Sins of the Assassin*, Robert Ferrigno is now two-thirds of the way toward completing a series of thrillers—with plenty of graphic violence, and some graphic sex—that also comprise a serious work of dystopian fiction.

The books take place in the 2040s, when most of what is now the United States has become an Islamic republic. (Most of the deeply Christian South—the Bible Belt—resists Islamic rule and secedes.) Ferrigno began his projected trilogy of popular fictional works on this theme with *Prayers for the Assassin*, which appeared in 2006; the concluding work is due out next year. To describe Ferrigno's brilliantly realized fictional universe, I'll draw on *Prayers* as well as the newly published *Sins*.

Sins of the Assassin
A Novel
by Robert Ferrigno
Scribner's, 400 pp., $24.95

What led most of Ferrigno's America to Islamize? The immediate cause was the devastation wrought by suitcase nuclear bombs that destroyed New York and Washington (and, for good measure, Mecca) in 2015. These attacks were blamed on the Mossad. But the "Zionist Betrayal," as it came to be called, was not enough by itself to promote massive conversion to Islam. In the words of a historian quoted in *Sins*:

> Western churches, rather than offering moral guidance, were weak and vacillating, unwilling to condemn even the most immoral behavior. Islam offered a bright light and a clear answer, and the faithful could not build mosques fast enough to satisfy the need. While no force of arms could defeat the armies of the West, it was their moral and spiritual void that ultimately vanquished them.

Furthermore, one of Ferrigno's characters adds the following analysis of what, for us, are current events:

> The U.S. military won every battle [in Iraq], but they had no voice, no message that could be heard. [Those who monitored TV stations] never saw a hero, only the dead. A war without heroes, without victories. Only petty atrocities inflated for all the world to see, clucked over by millionaire news anchors and fatuous movie stars. [The] president himself apologized. *We must show that we are more humane than the terrorists*, he said. . . . Good fortune beyond the . . . wildest dreams [of America's opponents], an enemy who wanted to be loved. Be ashamed of the war and soon you will be ashamed of the warriors—the warriors got that message soon enough. . . . The Iraq debacle broke the nation's spirit, hobbled its ability to defend itself. The former regime never recovered.

This critique of moral relativism and national self-doubt is one of many aspects of the *Assassin* novels that testify to their—and Ferrigno's—conservatism. (To premise the novels on an Israeli attack on the United States would not, of course, be one of those aspects. But since the dust jacket for *Prayers* alludes to "shocking evidence that the nuclear attacks might *not* have been planned by Israel," I don't think I'm giving away the store by intimating that the Israelis may have been framed.)

Ferrigno has also made his conservatism clear outside of his books. He has spoken out on his web site to defend Mark Steyn against the human rights complaint launched by the Canadian Islamic Congress. In fact, Ferrigno says that he is "proud to be a footnote" to the Steyn controversy: The complaint blames Steyn, in part, for asserting that "America will be an Islamic Republic by the year 2040." This is not, however, a claim that Steyn himself has made; instead it is an accurate summation of the plot of *Prayers*, to be found in Steyn's review of it (and in *America Alone*, which includes two excerpts from *Prayers*).

Both *Prayers* and *Sins* tell the story of a battle between a Muslim hero and a Muslim villain. It was clever of Ferrigno to make his hero a Muslim: How can his books be deemed "Islamophobic" if they celebrate a Muslim hero? (Needless to say, some readers nevertheless find the books Islamophobic, but their complaint would surely be greater if the books pitted a Christian or Jewish hero against a Muslim villain.) The hero in question is Rakkim Epps, formerly a member of the Fedayeen, "a small, elite force of genetically enhanced holy warriors." In particular, he was a member of the still-more-elite shadow warriors (troops trained to infiltrate the Bible Belt). Shadow warriors are typically discovered and killed within two-and-a-half years of their first mission; yet so great is Rakkim's prowess that he survived six years before leaving his post.

But Rakkim is more than someone with superhuman skills in armed combat. He is appealingly cynical, something of a Bogart figure. (His interactions with his girlfriend and later wife call to mind the byplay between Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall in their movies.) Most significantly, Rakkim is the quintessential moderate Muslim. Whether or not massive numbers of moderate Muslims exist in real life, a truly impressive specimen inhabits the *Assassin* novels.

Rakkim is tolerant. His best friend is a Roman Catholic policeman. (Only 70 percent of the Islamic republic's citizens are Muslim, and the remaining 30 percent are almost entirely Catholic.) Rakkim also works closely with

Joel Schwartz is an adjunct senior fellow at the Hudson Institute.

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a family of Jewish scientific geniuses who live underground to avoid persecution. Furthermore, Rakkim is monogamous: Occasionally he tells acquaintances that he has only one wife because one is all he can handle.

Most of all, Rakkim is horrified by violence in the name of religion: "I believe we have to act as if God is watching," he says. "As if God cares. I believe we have to act as if Paradise awaits the good and the brave, and that the hottest fires of hell await those who do evil in God's name." The as-ifs may explain why Rakkim is said by the narrator to be "a Muslim in name only." On the other hand, he also says the following of himself: "I believe that there is no God but Allah, and that Muhammad is his messenger. That is *all* I am certain of. I remain a Muslim. Not a good Muslim, but a believer all the same."

ROBERT FERRIGNO

It was clever of Ferrigno to make his hero a Muslim: How can his books be deemed 'Islamophobic' if they celebrate a Muslim hero?

By contrast, the principal villain is a Muslim who does evil in God's name: The fabulously rich Hassan Muhammad—also known as the Old One—who is "far beyond a hundred, very far, possessed of a God-given vitality enhanced by organ transplants and the best science money could buy." How old is the Old One? In the early 1970s his donations to politicians and journalists led to the massive increase of Muslim immigration to Europe: "The slow-motion conquest of Europe, the nearly bloodless transformation into an Islamic continent, had been perhaps his greatest victory."

More recently, it was "the Old One who fine-tuned bin Laden's clumsy plan" for September 11. Subsequently, it was the Old One's money, "filtered through numerous fronts, that had financed the academic think tanks and jihadi legal defense teams" that opposed the war on terror. Furthermore, the Old One worsened the carnage of Hurricane Katrina by having "a dozen small explosive charges placed under the levees of the Ninth Ward." In short, the Old One is a walking conspiracy theory. Today's left pins less blame on Halliburton than Ferrigno assigns to the Old One.

In the *Assassin* novels the Old One conspires to overthrow the comparatively moderate leadership of the Islamic republic. In his self-conception

> the Old One was the man come to lead the world, the Mahdi, the twelfth imam, the Islamic messiah come to guide the world away from materialism and idolatry. The man chosen by Allah to appear at the End-Time, chosen to create a one-world caliphate under sharia law, and usher in an age of peace and piety. After the nonbelievers were put to the sword.

Like any work of dystopian fiction, the *Assassin* novels should be judged less by their predictions than by their assessments of the weaknesses of our world. Having already shown how Ferrigno faults contemporary America, I'll conclude by briefly discussing his critique of Islamicized politics.

In Ferrigno's portrayal, Islamic rule decreases security, freedom, prosperity, and innovation. The Islamic republic is comparatively moderate, but there are limits to that moderation because moderates don't hold sway in many localities.

> While Seattle [the republic's capital] and Southern California were bastions of moderation, even in the capital, the Black Robes [the religious police, resembling the Saudi Commission for the Protection of Virtue and Suppression of Vice] enforced their dictates on the fundamentalist population. A devout Muslim woman unescorted by a brother or husband could be whipped on the streets of Seattle, and adulterers and fornicators were stoned to death in the countryside. Fundamentalist redoubts like . . . Milwaukee and Chicago were worse—governed by the most extreme sharia law.

In an ironic reversal of today's culture wars, Ferrigno goes out of his way to inform us that San Francisco—now known as New Fallujah—is perhaps the worst fundamentalist hotbed: "Harlots and homosexuals, witches and Jews dangled from the high beams" of the Bridge of Skulls—formerly known as the Golden Gate.

The Islamic republic is predictably most dangerous for women and Jews. Women who attempt to flee from their fathers or husbands fall prey to bounty hunters who forcibly seek to return them to their homes. As for Jews, the moderate chief of state security insisted in the early years of the republic "that any Jews who converted to Islam must be spared. . . . [He] had been able to insure the lives of the converts, but no one had been able to insure their treatment." Jewish converts—and, for that matter, Catholics—suffer considerable discrimination.

The Islamic republic is, of course, far less free than America today. The First Amendment was "gutted, . . . and the former protection of the others [in the Bill of Rights] limited." In particular, the Second Amendment was completely eliminated: "No guns allowed, not for private citizens." Furthermore, the orderly transfer

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of political power that we take for granted has also disappeared. The Islamic republic witnesses frequent political assassinations.

In addition, the Islamic regime is economically and technologically backward. In the words of a minor character, "We used to lead the world in science and technology. Hard to believe, isn't it? Now, every year we have fewer graduates in engineering and mathematics. Our manufacturing plants are outdated, our farm productivity falling, and patent applications are only forty percent of what they were in the old regime."

In sum, Ferrigno's novels offer a depressing contrast between the bad old days and the bad new days. America before the Islamic takeover was a "country without shame," whereas America after the takeover is a country in which

> people are scared. Afraid they're going to do the wrong thing, say the wrong thing, *think* the wrong thing. Yes, the Americans [before the takeover] were drunk on freedom. Yes, they lacked shame, but they did glorious things too with that freedom. Breakthroughs in science and medicine. Inquiries into the mysteries of the universe. Wonderful things.

It will be interesting to see if, in the trilogy's concluding novel, a regime can be created in which Americans again feel appropriate shame but not inappropriate fear. In that context it is worth pointing to two hints dropped in *Sins*. Much of *Sins* concerns a quest for something that is hidden in the Bible Belt; at one point the search is said to be for "the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States, the most sacred documents of the former regime." Furthermore, *Sins* implies that the final novel will explore the efforts of people in the Islamic republic and the Bible Belt to put "aside their differences for one goal. Reunification."

Will the sectarian Muslim and Christian polities reunite on some nonsectarian basis? If so, will the sacred documents of the former regime be rediscovered? Stay tuned; we should find out next year. ♦

Animated Aristophanes

The Idiot, The Oddity, but not Homer (Simpson).

BY ELI LEHRER

Eric Cartman and friends

SOUTH PARK DIGITAL STUDIOS LLC.

About half way through its 12th season, *South Park* (Comedy Central, Wednesdays, 10 P.M. ET) has attacked, to take just the first five letters of the alphabet, AIDS research, Britney Spears, Canadians, drug-related social panics, and Eliot Spitzer. Indeed, it's difficult to find an interest group, ideology, or big name celebrity the show hasn't yet managed to mock.

South Park, of course, is an animated show about the often absurd adventures of four foul-mouthed fourth-graders—they aged in the fourth season but not since—living in the town of South Park, Colorado. Most stories revolve around antihero Eric Cartman, an enormously fat, scheming, and bigoted nine-year-old who counts Hitler as his hero and hippies as his primary enemies. Crudely animated—two shorts and the show's initial pilot were created with paper cutouts, and today's computer-animated version retains the same look—*South Park*'s uniquely stylized visual vocabulary gives it enormous freedom to offend. Past episodes have included "on camera" depictions of cannibalism, defecation, misshapen breasts that hang down to an unfortunate woman's waist, and a nebbishy version of Jesus.

At least two books of academic essays, a full-length cultural study (Toni Johnson-Woods's *Blame Canada*), and a perceptive book of media criticism (Brian Anderson's *South Park Conservatives*) have dealt with the show at length. So far, indeed, extended essays have compared it to everything from Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* (convinc-

Eli Lehrer is a senior fellow at the Competitive Enterprise Institute.

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ing) to medieval carnival traditions (a stretch). But its real roots may go even deeper. In fact, more than any other piece of modern pop culture, *South Park* may borrow and even revive the forms, ideals, and purpose of the ancient Greek comic theater. At once, *South Park* manages to combine social relevance with absolutely absurd humor and does so, in part, through its enormously stylized presentation of the world.

Aristophanes' *The Frogs*—recently issued in a new, funny, energetic, easy-to-read translation from Canadian academic Ian Johnston (Richer Resources, 108 pp., $9.95)—offers as good a point of departure as any.

First performed at a festival dedicated to the god Dionysus in 405 B.C., it tells the story of a foolish Dionysus as he journeys to the underworld with his smarter-than-he-is slave Xanthias. The two go to seek better authors of Greek tragedy because (Dionysus says) the more recent playwrights haven't reached the levels of older ones. The two have a number of adventures, including an encounter with the legendary strongman Hercules, a trip across the River Styx that involves a croaking contest between Dionysus and an enormous number of frogs—hence the title—and finally, a long, slightly tedious in-joke-laden contest between the great tragedians Aeschylus and Euripides that was funnier to Greeks than to any modern audience. (Aeschylus wins.)

Although probably Aristophanes' best play—it pulls off the task of being very funny while making intellectually interesting points about the nature of artistic creation and cultural change — *The Frogs* is not his funniest. That honor goes to the infamous story of an all-female multinational antiwar sex strike he recounts in *Lysistrata* (a play that, in Jeffrey Henderson's popular translation, averages one penis joke per page while conveying a profound antiwar message).

When it comes to these Greek dramas, perfectly good translations like Johnston's and Henderson's—and, for that matter, the best modern performances—deliver a far different experience than Greeks would have enjoyed. Critic Toby Lester has remarked that today's experience of any Greek play or poem is equivalent to watching a "play" by Richard Wagner or reading "poetry" by Stephen Sondheim (himself the creator of a musical based on *The Frogs*). In other words, simply reading the plays or watching them in modern performance gives viewers only part of the *South Park*-like experience the Athenians would have enjoyed.

Performed in front of free-male-only audiences, Athenian plays served public and private purposes simultaneously. For Athenian citizens, and some privileged Greek foreigners living in Athens, attendance at the theater—a public amenity sponsored by the wealthy—represented a key opportunity for alcohol-lubricated social bonding in public. On the other hand, the experience remained disassociated from daily life: All-male casts invariably wore masks and long robes to hide their body shapes and, when they played male roles, strap-on phalluses. Performances focused on annunciation, choral accompaniment, and occasional visual spectacles rather than any semblance of genuine, deep emotion. Plays brought people together in social settings but, at the same time, offered a spectacle that contained social criticism by means of disconnection from ordinary experience.

This oddly disassociated form created a license for social criticism that simply wasn't available elsewhere in Athenian society. Tragedies like Aeschylus' *The Persians*, the single oldest work of Western dramatic literature, could take the side of Greece's sworn enemies; and comedies—well, comedies could and did offend the mighty gods and great *strategoi* alike.

South Park continues this tradition of disassociated, absurdist, satirical comedy that's at once both deeply connected to modern politics and the product of an absurd counter-universe. Operating largely independent of any bureaucracy—show creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone write all of the scripts, voice most of the characters, oversee the animation, and often finish episodes only hours before they air—*South Park* has unusual freedom to roll with the punches. And although Parker and Stone identify as moderate libertarians who support gay rights, hate big government, and have a soft spot for things like road building and the war on terror—the show really won't consistently please anyone. Sanctimony and shrillness emanating from the right, even the libertarian right, gets just as much criticism as the same from the left. One episode even depicted the Republican party as the literal tool of demonic forces.

Just as *The Frogs* makes wonderful absurdist satire out of literary criticism and cultural change, recent episodes of *South Park* have attacked such esoteric topics as Bono's work on Third World debt, the new-age Gaia hypothesis that Earth is actually one giant interconnected organism, and medical research fundraising. This season's best episode to date—entitled "Major Boobage"—simultaneously skewers all sides in the war on drugs, media drug alarmism, the FCC's inconsistent standards for depicting mammary glands on broadcast television, sanctimonious politicians in general (and former Gov. Eliot Spitzer in particular), and, for good measure, the 1981 Canadian animated movie *Heavy Metal*.

Despite this almost-too-eclectic agenda, the result is a brilliant attack on all stripes of public hypocrisy.

In fact, the show's dissociated world allows *South Park* to make light of topics that lack any intrinsic humor. As well as they might have done things, recent much-lauded TV comedies didn't break any new ground when they found humor in the absurdity of everyday life (*Seinfeld*), sexual politics (*Friends*), or class tension (*Cheers*). These things are among the most ancient topics for comedy and, of course, *South Park* jokes about them all the time, too. No matter how well done—and the best sitcoms have shown flashes of brilliance—this is not quite as hard as creating genuinely funny humor concerned with Third World debt and literary criticism.

Through its uniquely warped worldview, *South Park* has managed to revive truly primeval traditions of Western satirical comedy and make continuously sharp political points at the same time. After a dozen seasons, *South Park* remains as pointed as ever. And it's also a good source of breast jokes. ♦

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Spc. Daniel Love in action near Shurakian, Afghanistan

Americans Under Fire

Three accounts of fighting the war on terror.

BY MACKUBIN THOMAS OWENS

It seems that Americans have forgotten how to honor their war heroes.

When I was growing up in the 1950s, most boys knew the story of Lt. Audie Murphy, the most decorated soldier of World War II. Indeed, after the war, he became a fairly successful actor. The public, including Hollywood, recognized him for what he was—a hero. Most of us also knew the story of Marine Sgt. John Basilone, who earned the Medal of Honor on Guadalcanal. He was brought home to help sell war bonds but kept asking to go back to the Pacific. His superiors finally relented. He was killed on Iwo Jima. The American public recognized him for what he was—a hero.

No more. Americans have performed extraordinary feats of bravery in Iraq and Afghanistan, but with the exception of those who regularly read military blogs, who knows about them?

Mackubin Thomas Owens is professor of national security affairs at the Naval War College, and editor of Orbis, *the journal of the Foreign Policy Research Institute. He is writing a history of U.S. civil-military relations.*

Moment of Truth in Iraq
How a New 'Greatest Generation' of American Soldiers Is Turning Defeat and Disaster into Victory and Hope
by Michael Yon
Richard Vigilante, 256 pp., $29.95

House to House
An Epic Memoir of War
by David Bellavia with John R. Bruning
Free Press, 336 pp., $26

Hard Corps
From Gangster to Marine Hero
by Marco Martinez
Crown Forum, 256 pp., $24.95

Things changed with Vietnam. Although Americans fought bravely there, the press, if not the American people, began to treat those who fought in Vietnam as either moral monsters, victims, or both. The dysfunctional Vietnam vet became a staple of popular culture. Despite the fact that atrocities were rare, My Lai came to symbolize the entire war; and thanks to the press's preoccupation with the anomaly of My Lai, Lt. William Calley became the poster boy for Vietnam. The honorable and heroic performance of the vast majority of those who served in Vietnam went largely unrecognized.

For example, how many Americans know the story of Marine Lt. John P. Bobo, who received the Medal of Honor for his actions in Vietnam? Here is part of his citation:

> When an exploding enemy mortar round severed Lieutenant Bobo's right leg below the knee, he refused to be evacuated and insisted upon being placed in a firing position to cover the movement of the command group to a better location. With a web belt around his leg serving as a tourniquet, and with his leg jammed into the dirt to curtail the bleeding, he remained in this position and delivered devastating fire into the ranks of the enemy attempting to overrun the Marines. Lieutenant Bobo was mortally wounded while firing his weapon into the main point of the enemy attack but his valiant spirit inspired his men to heroic efforts.

The reason for this disparity in coverage is simple. My Lai fit the conventional narrative of the antiwar left: Bobo's story did not.

Things haven't changed much since then. The conventional wisdom concerning Vietnam has been absorbed by today's press, even by those too young to remember our Southeast Asia misadventure. The result is a troubling predisposition to believe the worst about those who are willing to fight in Iraq or Afghanistan.

In 2005 Army Sgt. 1st Class Paul Ray Smith became the first soldier in the Iraq war to be awarded the Medal of Honor. He was killed in action when his outnumbered unit was attacked by Iraqi forces at the Baghdad airport on April 4,

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2003, and is credited with saving hundreds of lives.

In the *Wall Street Journal* Robert Kaplan observed last year that, "according to LexisNexis, by June 2005, two months after his posthumous award, [Smith's] stirring story had drawn only 90 media mentions, compared to 4,677 for the supposed Koran abuse at Guantanamo Bay, and 5,159 for the court-martialed Abu Ghraib guard Lynndie England."

The slander continues. This past January 13 the *New York Times* published the first of a series of articles recounting the sad cases of servicemen returning from combat zones and committing killings. In "Across America, Deadly Echoes of Foreign Battles," the reporters wrote that the "*Times* found 121 cases in which veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan committed a killing in this country, or were charged with one, after their return from war."

But the methodology underlying the series was shoddy: There was no attempt to compare the homicide rate among servicemen to that of the same age cohort in the population at large (the former is much lower than the latter). But that apparently didn't matter to the *Times*. All that mattered was the conventional narrative: Antisocial behavior is the norm among servicemen, especially those who have been in combat. Combat veterans are inherently dysfunctional, teetering on the edge, ready to snap at any time.

In any large population, especially one that involves the management of violence, we should not be surprised that people snap. But the Vietnam narrative still prevails in the press, and the public is far more likely to read about Lynndie England than Paul Ray Smith. This is a sad state of affairs.

In his remarkable book about Falluja, *No True Glory*, Bing West wrote that stories of soldierly courage deserve "to be recorded and read by the next generation. Unsung, the noblest deed will die." There are now a handful of new books that attempt to do what West calls for, and these three titles—*Moment of Truth in Iraq* by Michael Yon, *House to House* by David Bellavia, and *Hard Corps* by Marco Martinez—are worth a look.

President Bush decorates a wounded Pfc. Demario Hicks

UPI PHOTO / JOYCE. N. BOGOSIAN / WHITE HOUSE PRESS OFFICE

The first, by an intrepid reporter—called by some the Ernie Pyle of this war—is a detailed portrayal of the remarkable soldiers who have helped turn the tide in Iraq. The second recounts the story of an Army non-commissioned officer during the horrendous second battle of Falluja in November 2004, for which he was recommended for the Distinguished Service Cross and the Medal of Honor itself. The last is the story of a onetime gang member who rejected the aimlessness of the gangster life to join the Marine Corps, becoming the first Hispanic since Vietnam to be awarded the Navy Cross, the Navy-Marine Corps version of the Distinguished Service Cross.

Yon, who has been providing straightforward dispatches about the war on his website almost since the outset, has proved to be the most reliable source of information about how things are going on the ground in Iraq. In his dispatches, Yon, a former Special Forces soldier, has provided a perspective that one doesn't get from "mainstream" reporters who write stories from the Green Zone based on reports from Iraqi stringers whose veracity may be in question. Unfortunately, Yon is not well known outside the blogosphere; *Moment of Truth in Iraq* will change this state of affairs.

Yon has been no cheerleader for the military or the Bush administration. Those who know him say he is completely apolitical. Indeed, he raised the ire of senior military officers by criticizing the approaches to Iraq that he believed were leading to defeat, and was twice denied access to the country. Yon praises Gen. David Petraeus and the surge, but makes clear that it is working because of the remarkable soldiers and Marines who are implementing it.

Two of these remarkable individuals have written memoirs, and the stories they tell are riveting and poignant. Those who have served in the military, especially if their service involved combat, will recognize the dynamic both describe in recounting their experiences: cohesion, loyalty, trust, and comradeship. In *House to House*, the reader (as in *The Iliad*) is thrown *in media res* where these characteristics are taken as the starting point. *Hard Corps* recounts the way the characteristics are built during Marine boot camp and infantry training.

Neither volume is for the faint of heart: The language and the descrip-

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tions of events are graphic. Bellavia's account of killing an insurgent with a knife is a case in point:

> The blade sinks into him, and he wails with terror and pain. The blade finally sinks all the way to the handle. . . . [The insurgent's] mouth is curled in a grimace. His teeth are bared. . . . I'm bathed in warmth from neck to chest. I can't see it but I know it is his blood. His eyes lose their luster. The hate evaporates. . . . He takes a last ragged breath, and his eyes go dim, still staring into mine.

All too often, the popular culture portrays our soldiers as victims or cold-blooded killers. But the flesh and blood men described in *House to House* and *Hard Corps* don't fit those caricatures. They may kill the enemy, but they don't take pleasure in it. They are Americans, and they are *men*. They miss their loved ones at home, but they forge a bond with their comrades that only those who have been in combat can understand. They feel guilty when they are away from their comrades, and this takes a great psychological toll, especially on men like Bellavia who are family men.

Our logistical system may be magnificent, enabling American soldiers to fight far from America's shores; but it doesn't mean that these hard, dirty, exhausted infantrymen aren't cynical and angry when it seems they are the only ones bearing the brunt of the action. It doesn't mean that they don't have disdain for those rear echelon types who eat hot chow at secure bases while the infantrymen fight and die in the dirty, bloody streets of Falluja.

All of these books illustrate the critical importance of unit cohesion in combat. During the "happy times" of the 1990s, academic experts assured us that cohesion was overrated, that technology had changed the nature of war by eliminating friction and the "fog of uncertainty," and that henceforth conflicts would be fought from 15,000 feet with precision weapons. Accordingly, they told us, cohesion should never be used as an excuse to prevent social engineering—such as the integration of women in combat. We haven't heard much about that in a while, and these books explain why.

Moment of Truth in Iraq, *House to House*, and *Hard Corps* confirm the research on men in battle that has shown unit cohesion to be a necessary element of battlefield success. Cohesion in combat is far more than mere teamwork: Cohesion arises from the bond among disparate individuals who have nothing in common but facing death and misery together. This bond is akin to what the Greeks called *philia*—friendship, comradeship, brotherly love. *Philia* has been well described by J. Glenn Gray in his discussion of unit cohesion in *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle*:

> Numberless soldiers have died, more or less willingly, not for country or honor or religious faith or for any other abstract good, but because they realized that by fleeing their posts and rescuing themselves, they would expose their companions to greater danger. Such loyalty to the group is the essence of fighting morale. The commander who can preserve and strengthen it knows that all other physical and psychological factors are little in comparison. The feeling of loyalty, it is clear, is the result not the cause of comradeship. Comrades are loyal to each other spontaneously and without any need for reasons.

Spc. Mark Ramirez in Mosul

U.S. DEPT. OF DEFENSE / SPC. JOHN CROSBY

By describing the horror and carnage of real war, *House to House* and *Hard Corps* drive these observations home in a powerful way. And in light of the *New York Times*'s story about homicidal vets, it is interesting to note that had Marco Martinez *not* become a Marine, it is very likely that he *would* be in prison now, possibly for homicide. But since he wouldn't have been a veteran, he would not have qualified for the *Times*'s narrative.

Some will find the detailed descriptions in these books troubling. All describe men at war killing other men. But as George Orwell once observed, "People sleep peaceably in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf." These books also remind us that a liberal democracy faces a dilemma when it comes to the relationship between the military and society at large: The military cannot govern itself in accordance with the liberal principles that it ultimately defends. It must be governed by virtues that many civilians see as brutal, and even barbaric, because the military is one of the few jobs where you may have to tell someone: "Go die." If we cannot count on members of the military to prepare for such an eventuality, the military will fail, and if it does fail, the liberal society it protects may not survive.

We should be thankful for David Bellavia and Marco Martinez and countless others who have been willing to lay a "costly . . . sacrifice upon the altar of freedom." And we should thank Michael Yon for helping to tell their story. ♦

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Blessed to Give

The art of philanthropy, as written in literature.

BY MARTIN MORSE WOOSTER

One of the perennial discussions among philanthropists is whether philanthropy is an art or a science. Employees of nonprofits—like those in such comparable service professions as social work, nursing, or teaching—are always trying to hone the tinsel tools of social science to make what they do seem professional, measurable, scientific. One of the debates over philanthropic professionalism is whether having a master's degree in nonprofit management is a good idea; another is how and whether grants should be evaluated—and whether or not the evaluations are useful.

Giving Well, Doing Good
Readings for Thoughtful Philanthropists
Edited by Amy A. Kass
Indiana, 490 pp., $50

The countervailing view is that philanthropy is an art, and efforts to make it seem "scientific" waste time and money. The champions of philanthropy-as-art argue that while you can measure how many poor people take a job-training class, you can't calculate how many of these students decide to adopt good work habits, or determine that working is a better use of time than sloth. They believe that the art of giving money away—particularly to small and struggling groups that can't afford professional grant writers—can't be taught from a textbook.

Both the artists and the scientists could learn a great deal from Amy A. Kass's fine anthology. *Giving Well, Doing Good* includes many papers, commissioned for the book, from eminent scholars; but mostly it is a literary anthology of stories, essays, and plays. Kass's key insight is that today's philanthropists have a lot to learn from the great writers of the past.

Kass teaches at the University of Chicago and is a fellow at the Hudson Institute (full disclosure: Hudson published my book, *Great Philanthropic Mistakes*). Her goal is that the excerpts will "illuminate fundamental questions about the idea and practice of philanthropy, questions of great importance to philanthropy's future." And those excerpts are wide-ranging: Authors include Plato, Lao Tzu, Chekhov, Tolstoy, and E.M. Forster. There's even science fiction, Ursula K. LeGuin's "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas." Kass is especially diligent at unearthing obscure writers whose work deserves more exposure: The writing of Gordon Weaver, whose 1972 story "Haskell Hooked on the Northern Cheyenne" is a hilarious critique of strident fund-raising letters, particularly impressed me.

What the excerpts show is that nearly every problem philanthropists face today is age-old. The work of a program officer, coolly sifting the worthy from the unworthy, may seem, to the outsider, a little prissy; but W.S. Gilbert made this point better in *Princess Ida*:

I'm a genuine philanthropist—all other kinds are sham.
Each little fault of temper and each social defect
In my erring fellow-creatures, I endeavor to correct . . .
But although I make myself as pleasant as I can,
Yet everybody says I'm such a disagreeable man
And I don't know why!

Program officers also have to worry about when to stop a grant. How can a philanthropist ensure that his wealth won't lead to perpetual dependency? Here a close study of Henri Barbusse's "The Eleventh" (1918) might be in order. Barbusse posits a "palace-hospital" that every month admits 10 nameless beggars, who spend a month living like kings, only to be evicted at the end of the month and replaced by 10 other beggars. The protagonist ultimately quits the hospital because he cannot close the door to worthy recipients of aid. Was his action the right thing to do? What could the hospital do to make its charity more humane? Discuss.

Still another problem foundations face is how much they should give. One of the endless debates in philanthropy is whether or not foundations should increase their grantmaking more than the current annual mandate of 5 percent of endowment. (For decades this "payout debate" has been one which philanthropoids find exciting but which induces catatonia in most people.)

Yet philanthropists ought to consider the timeless advice of John Wesley, founder of Methodism, in a sermon included here: Christians should "gain all you can . . . but this it is certain we ought not to do; we ought not to gain money at the expense of life, nor (which is in effect the same thing) at the expense of our health." Second, said Wesley, "save all you can" while not spending "merely to gratify the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, or the pride of life." Finally, we should "give all you can." God, Wesley taught, "placed you here not as a proprietor, but as a steward. . . . For all that is laid out in this manner [of giving] is really given to God."

Nearly every excerpt raises deep and timeless questions, and donors who finish Amy Kass's collection will gain a deeper understanding of their calling—and, perhaps, discover new writers to enjoy. ♦

Martin Morse Wooster, senior fellow at the Capital Research Center, is the author, most recently, of The Great Philanthropists and the Problem of 'Donor Intent.'

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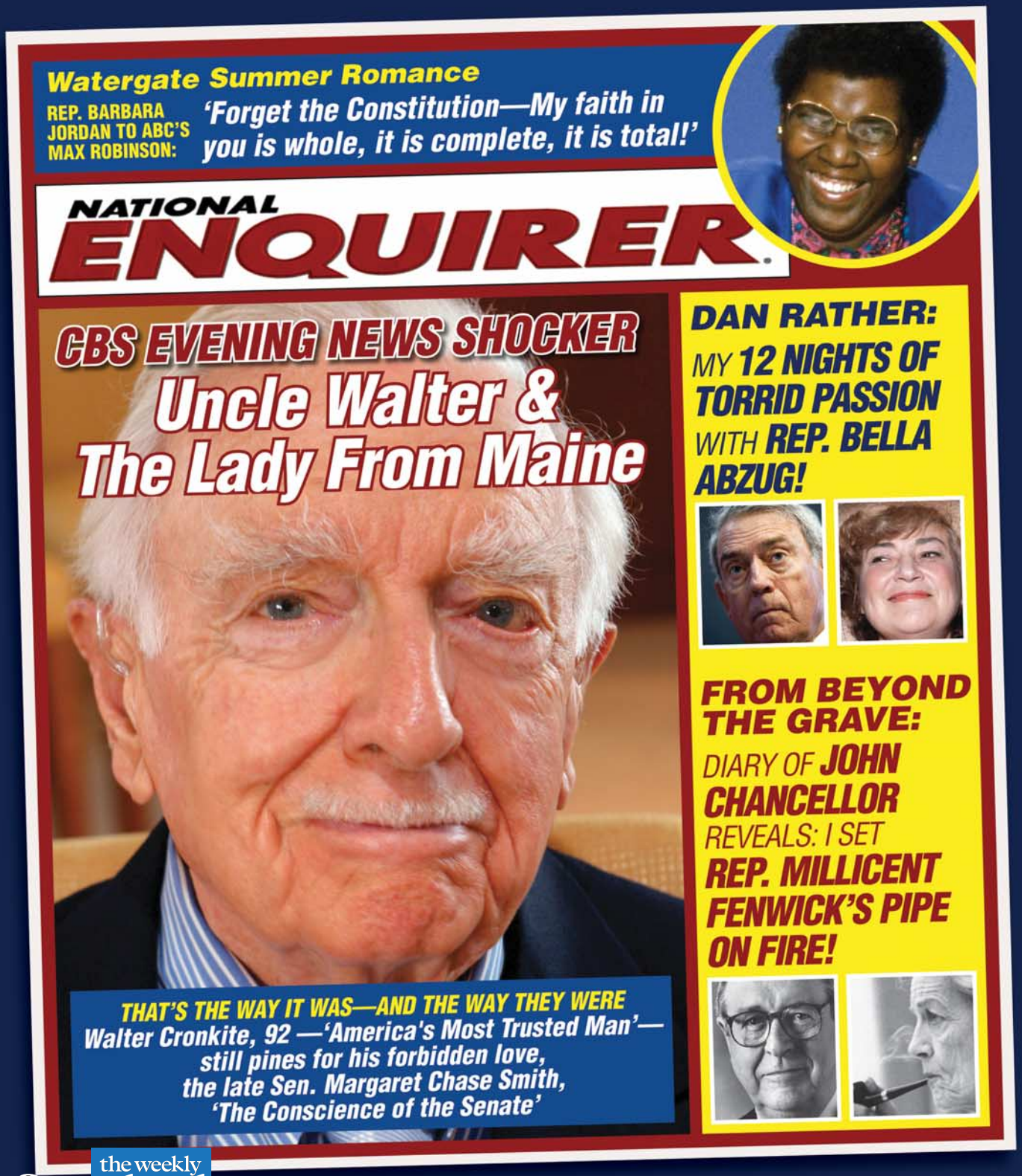
"After three decades of keeping mum, Barbara Walters now says she had a past affair with married U.S. Senator Edward Brooke, whom she remembers as 'exciting' and 'brilliant.'" —Associated Press, April 30



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